letting it linger

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Summary

Once they begin to notice that Bakugou's got some odd habits, Kirishima and the others just can't seem to stop noticing that there is something weird going on. They try to figure it out, but only one conclusion makes any sense:

Bakugou got himself a girlfriend.

But the question remained, who would be willing to put up with *Bakugou Katsuki?*

Notes

look I've been putting this one off for a while but now that I've finished terminology I'm like 'shit yeah let's get this up so people have something *else* to wait for!'

also, this one has some really, really fluffy gay shit in it. there's your forewarning, friends! (incredible, not a drop of angst to be had here)

observations lead to questions

Eijirou heard a door shutting loud enough to get rid of the last of his grogginess as he stepped out of his bathroom. He stood, blinking, before going to the door of his dorm room and opening it up. Was someone upset about something? Or maybe there was some sort of wake up call?

He poked his head out, but, looking up and down the hall, didn't see anyone but Bakugou. His classmate was headed towards the stairs, hands in his pockets, bag slung over his shoulder, already in uniform. Eijirou considered calling out to him but decided against it. He wore only a towel around the waist, after all, and if Bakugou was headed out already, Eijirou would undoubtedly be late if he dawdled.

But when he got back into his room, he noticed that he had plenty of time, actually. Bakugou was just early. Laughing a little, Eijirou said, "I wonder if he remembers he's not actually at home so he doesn't have to get a train to school!"

Then he realized that Bakugou making a mistake like that would, most likely, put him in a bad mood all day. Eijirou groaned, flopped onto his bed and lay there for a while. Just when it seemed like Bakugou was getting friendlier, too!

Eijirou paused outside Bakugou's door. He hadn't heard anything all morning and was worried the other teen had slept through his alarm.

Shouji, who waited down the hall, called to him, "He's not there. I already checked."

"Bakugou sure gets up early in the morning," Eijirou said. "I wonder what he's doing…." He frowned a bit at the closed door but walked away to join Shouji.

"He's not the first to class, though," his classmate said, "Isn't that always Iida?"

Eijirou nodded. They both got to the stairs at the same time. Eijirou grinned, waving to Sero who was coming down from the fifth floor.

“Hey man!”

“Hey guys,” Sero grinned. “You’re pretty chipper this morning, Kirishima.” He hurried down the steps to join them, walking behind a few paces. “Have you already adjusted to Bakugou’s morning shouting?”

“Eh?” Eijirou blinked. “I didn’t hear him at all this morning.”

“What?” Sero asked.

“Really?” Shouji also asked.

“Yeah! I mean, if I’m awake I hear the door slam or him shouting, but otherwise I guess I sleep right through it.” Eijirou laughed. “It’s kind of the same in class? I can sleep through him shouting then if I’m tired already.”

Shouji’s shoulder’s slumped. “Bakugou’s been waking me up every day this week with his shouting. He’s like my own personal alarm clock… that goes off every five minutes two hours early, screaming fuck over and over.”

Eijirou winced. He’d heard some of that before, when he got up early to do a little homework or a workout before class.

“I’m just glad I don’t share a wall with him,” Sero said. “Otherwise, I’d probably end up like Todoroki.”

“What’s up with Todoroki?” Eijirou asked.

“I found him out on the veranda debating pulling his mattress out there to sleep. Seriously, I can’t believe they didn’t soundproof at least Bakugou’s room.” Sero complained.

“Where does he even go so early in the morning?” Shouji asked. “There’s no reason to get up that early. We’re five minutes away from the school.”

“He probably has early morning training he does,” Eijirou said, thinking of the lithe muscle that Bakugou sported. “Doesn’t Midoriya go running in the morning too? Those two really are something!”

Sero says something about ‘tryhards’ under his breath but he has a thoughtful expression. Shouji does too. Eijirou’s thinking about Midoriya and Bakugou going for a run in the morning together and

kind of wants to laugh at such a wild idea. There's no way that they're training together even if they've gotten slightly less confrontational- they still view each other as absolute rivals, after all.

Shouji switches the conversation to homework as they reach the bottom floor. Eijirou answers him, putting the thoughts of Bakugou out of his mind entirely.

Sometimes, when Eijirou comes downstairs in the morning early enough that he can see Iida in the communal dining area having breakfast, he can smell coffee in the air. Iida isn't ever drinking any, though. He's eating breakfast and usually pouring over some book or another. This happens a couple of times before he finally asks about it.

Iida looks up from his book, blinking for a moment and then explains. "It's Bakugou," he adjusts his glasses. "He makes a thermos full in the mornings before he goes to class."

"Bakugou drinks coffee?" Eijirou said with surprise, poking his head out of the fridge where he was digging around for those boiled eggs he *knew* still had to be in there. The news about Bakugou is curious and new, though. They've been all living in the same dorm for almost a month and he *missed* that? How? "I've never seen him drink coffee."

"Presumably he drinks it before class begins and stows the thermos in his bag during the day," Iida said. "As I have never seen him in possession of the thermos or drinking from one before."

"Well, he does head to the school early," Eijirou admitted. Iida nodded to this. "I can see him taking a sport drink or even just ice water to drink for a workout, but coffee?"

"I can only tell you what I saw. I have not asked him about it since the first time, where he told me to… well you know how he is." Iida ended with a mutter.

Eijirou nodded. He did know how Bakugou was. Except apparently he didn't. He tells himself to ask Bakugou about it but, when class starts for the day and he finally meets up with his friend, Eijirou's forgotten about it

Somebody has bitten Bakugou.

Eijirou notices the faint red mark when their changing for gym. He's turning to Bakugou, a grin on his face and a joke half spoken when it splutters into nothing as he sees what is definitely teeth marks on skin.

Bakugou, of course, notices first that he stopped mid sentence and glares at Eijirou. "What?" He snapped, doing up the front of his pants. He sees where Eijirou is looking, eyes tracking the red head's gaze to his own shoulder and then, to Eijirou's surprise, Bakugou *blushes*. "That little fuckhead," he snarls to himself.

Then his angry, heated gaze is on Eijirou, who immediately tries to laugh and displace Bakugou's anger with a dismissive hand wave.

"Fuck off, hair-for-brains," Bakugou sneers. He tugged his shirt quickly over his head, "Or I'll give you something that hurts fucking worse than this, you hear me?" He threatens, holding his hand out, palm up. It's been weeks since Bakugou has openly threatened Eijirou and the others notice, looking up and over at them.

"Yeah, yeah," Eijirou says, still stunned. He laughs again, "Sure, sure." He sounds like an idiot, like Denki with his brain fried but really he can't think of any response at *all*.

Bakugou slams his locker shut so hard that Tokoyami's next to it bangs shut in sympathy. The explosive blond gives exactly zero shits and stomps out of the room, leaving a strange hole of silence behind.

"The hell was that about?" Sero asked, "Did someone shove a stick up his ass even farther than usual this morning?" Eijirou hears Todoroki snort in amusement. He has taken great pleasure in any little thing that annoys Bakugou recently because of the unspoken-but-very-loud-dorm-floor-war going on between him and the blond.

"Somebody bit him," Eijirou said, blinking. "On the shoulder."

A pause and then Midoriya whispered in shock, "Someone *bit* Kacchan?"

“On the *shoulder?”* Sero repeats.

“And he hasn’t been arrested for murder?” Todoroki again. Eijirou glances to him. He’s got shadows under his eyes. He’s the least adjusted out of all of them to the whole dorm situation, which Eijirou finds a little weird considering the fact that everyone kind of knows at this point his dad is a raging asshole on levels even beyond Bakugou on a bad day, so shouldn’t he be *glad* to be away from the man?

“Todoroki,” Midoriya said, soft and reproachful. Todoroki at least has the decency to look guilty and turn away.

“Maybe,” Denki said loudly, to disperse the even *more* awkward silence that comes after that, “he *wanted* to be bitten.”

It is, of course, Mineta who says what they’re all thinking, sounding both gleeful and mournful at once. “Bakugou has a *girlfriend?!”* Which would make him the first, out of them all.

Nobody can quite believe it but….

Nobody can think of any other good reason why he’d be bitten on the shoulder like that.

Of course, the next time that most of them are in the common room, Eijirou notices, again, that Bakugou is conspicuously absent. He’s handing over the bowl of popcorn that Iida asked him to pass when he does a slow pan of the room and finally asks, “Hey, has anyone seen Bakugou since… shit, the end of class? Was he even here for dinner?”

It’s a Friday night, the newly designated Class Movie Bonding Night, and tonight the girls got to choose the double feature. The first film, a classic called Zootopia, hasn’t started yet as most of them are still adjusting seating and cushions and blankets and whatnot.

Unsurprisingly, it’s Midoriya who joins him in looking around with a troubled little frown. He’s wedged himself between Uraraka and Tokoyami, who almost didn’t join them himself, and he’s so short that he shifts onto his knees to look around. “I haven’t seen him at all. Has anyone-”

“Oh!” Shouji cuts in, “I saw him leave his room earlier. Before dinner. He was in regular clothes? It looked like he was headed out somewhere.” He gives a nervous smile, “I didn’t ask, though.”

Eijirou frowns. “Weird. He did know about movie night, right? We told him, right, Denki?”

Denki rolls his eyes, “He told us to fuck off and enjoy our fucking loser party without him, remember?”

“Oh. Right.” Eijirou rubs his chin. “He’s been… weird lately. Off or something.”

“What do you mean?” Sero asks, “Hasn’t he been his usual shouty and raging self?”

“Oh ho ho!” Mineta cried, leaping to his feet, “He must have a hot date with his super secret girlfriend!”

“Whaaaa?!” The chorus is distinctly feminine. Uraraka, Ashida and others gape first at Mineta, then at each other, and then, unsurprisingly to Eijirou. “Bakugou has a girlfriend!? Who is it!?”

“I don’t know!” Eijirou quickly exclaimed. “He hasn’t said anything to me about it. We’re not even sure if he has got one. All we saw was the bite on his shoulder….” That is the Wrong Thing To Say, it turns out, because he is bombarded with all sorts of questions.

Very quickly, the pre-movie set up becomes a Discuss Bakugou’s Odd Behavior conversation that is, apparently, so interesting that even Iida doesn’t reprimand them for gossiping about a classmate. In the discussion, it comes out that Bakugou doesn’t just leave for school early, he comes back to his room late. Sometimes, he doesn’t come back for dinner at all, but he never makes himself anything- as though he’s already eaten. There have been times when one of the others caught him in the laundry room, sitting on a dryer with his phone in his lap and a weird almost-smile on his face.

Iida mentions the coffee Bakugou makes but doesn’t drink. Shouji mentions the Nice Clothing- as far as baggy pants and a tee can be considered ‘nice’- that he’s seen Bakugou leave in. Denki reminds people of the times that Bakugou doesn’t eat lunch with either of them but also with no one else in class.

It’s Midoriya who comes out with the weirdest thing, though. “I thought I saw him talking to some general education students a week

or two ago," he says, not looking at anyone, his chin in his hand, his brows furrowed in thought. Any quieter and he'd be mumbling. "I didn't think much of it at the time, I mean, I didn't see his face just the back of him so it might not have been him. But the uniform was right and so was his way of wearing it. I don't know what they were talking about but it was a boy and a girl and they were only talking. He wasn't shouting or swearing or *anything."*

Midoriya looks up, "Just before I had to go, I saw one of them hand over a packet of paper and bow to him. What could that possibly mean?"

No one knows, but everyone has a guess.

The chatter goes on for another twenty minutes before it's Decided that Yes, Bakugou has a girlfriend and Yes, she must obviously be in the General Department of Yuuei.

Once this is agreed upon by most of the group, the movie can finally start. Eijirou sits back, enjoys the film, the whole evening, until Denki leans over and says, "So… We have to find out what kind of girl can tolerate Bakugou, right? As his friends, we *have* to know."

Eijirou winces, knowing that if Bakugou catches them spying on them, they'll have bloody eardrums by the end of it, but nods. They do kind of have to know. Or at least, they really, *really want* to know.

They just won't let themselves be caught. It's as simple as that.

(It's not so simple at all.)

Following Bakugou lasts only three days.

Saturday is easy because he spends most of his time training or doing homework in his room. Sunday he doesn't even get up until after noon and actually plays games in the common room for a couple of hours before he vanishes. He's gone before Eijirou or anyone else can notice, one minute there, the next like he just walked out the front door or something.

Monday, though, Monday they get caught right away.

It's because Bakugou gets up hellishly early in the morning. Eijirou sets his alarm to get up at the same time but can only barely drag himself through getting ready by the time Bakugou's door opens. Cursing, he stumbles to his own and swings it open.

Bakugou glances over his shoulder at him, wearing a sleeveless top and shorts. Eijirou, for a long second, thinks that they've all been really, *really* stupidly wrong because clearly he just gets up early in the morning to go work out but then his eyes catch it.

There's a dark bruise on Bakugou's arm, right near the shoulder, right next to where the mostly healed bite mark is. It, too, looks like a bite, albeit a much more intense one. They stare at each other for a while before Bakugou flat out flips him off, shoves an earbud into his ear, and stalks off towards the stairs.

Eijirou stares after him before looking down at himself and realizing that he's half dressed in his school uniform. "Fuck it," he muttered and went back to bed.

He wakes up late the second time, Shouji knocking on his door, and it's only because he's half dressed from his four am wake up that he manages to get to class on time at all.

As he's rushing up the hallway, he sees Bakugou slip in the doorway just ahead of him, which just… boggles his mind. He knows he saw Bakugou up way early. What does he do after his workout? Come back and nap? Why is he just barely making it to class on time?

Denki hisses, "So? Where'd he go?" as Eijirou takes his seat but he just shrugs and sighs.

"I fell asleep." He muttered, "I mean, I saw him in workout clothes but it was four am, dude. I couldn't do it."

"Such weakness," Denki mutters and punches him lightly in the arm. Eijirou rubs the spot and frowns. "I could've done it."

"Then why *don't* you?" He snaps back, feeling unusually grumpy. Messing with his sleeping pattern and being way too wrapped up in Bakugou's mysteries can do that to a person.

"Because he'd notice me in an instant and blow my head off," Denki said. "Plus I don't want to catch him macking on some girl!"

They jump when Bakugou's feet land heavily on his desk right next to

them. Eijirou meets his eyes, smiles nervously and then glances to Denki.

Iida rescues them from awkward conversation by coming over and hassling Bakugou about his feet on the desk. It's a familiar sort of sound; Iida scolds, Bakugou insults, everything as normal. Then it abruptly changes when Iida decides to remind Bakugou that they are *supposed* to also remain in their dorms over night, *every* night and that Bakugou should *not* stay the night elsewhere like he did on Friday.

Bakugou is staring up at Iida, his ears a faint red, his face contorted into some sort of weird, angry but smug expression as Iida insists that he follow the rules of living in the dorm with at least *some* consistency. Even if he can't show respect for their classroom equipment; the rules of the school are something Bakugou should be familiar with!

Silence stretches out around Iida like a tide. People turn, as if, like Eijirou, they are just now realizing that Bakugou spent the night elsewhere on Friday. He'd been there all Saturday and most of Sunday so no one had even noticed but-

"Fine," Bakugou says, smugness winning out. His eyes glint like he's won, somehow, "I'll make sure to stay at the dorm from here on out, Glasses. Now fuck off."

Iida does, but only really because the door opens for Aizawa. Bakugou takes his feet off the desk, but that smug expression doesn't quite fade from his face for the rest of the day.

"I vote we *don't* stalk him," Denki whispers before lunch. "If someone else wants to know, let them do it. But we can wait, right Eijirou?"

"Right," he agrees. Bakugou doesn't eat lunch with them and they don't even consider pestering him about where he went.

(Mineta does, though. He gets punted across the room for his questions and no one else asks anything.)

Bakugou displays a few more marks on his back and shoulders during the week. The others notice, stare a little, but when he catches them

looking he just gets that smug look again.

I'm winning, that look says. Winning what, Eijirou's not sure. He has a feeling, though, they'll find out pretty soon.

questions lead to actions

Chapter Notes

> i've adjusted the chapter numbers because of the overall tones of the chapters. so, it seems like a little more but only because im chopping up larger chapters for these smaller more tied together pieces

If anyone were to ask Bakugou where it started; this thing-not-thing that he had going on, he would have said it was Shinsou's fault. Or rather, he would have said, *"Stupid fuck wouldn't stop standing around and gawking, so of fucking course I noticed him. He was being a creepy little shit."*

If anyone were to ask Shinsou where it started; this oddly-casual-yet-intense-dating thing they had going on, he would have pinned the blame squarely on Bakugou's shoulders. He wouldn't have done anything at all if Bakugou hadn't been there to provoke in the first place.

Specifically, he would have told the story a little like this.

It's early in the morning.

Hitoshi wakes from his light sleep to the sound of a distant buzzer. He sits up slowly. There's a weight on his abdomen that tumbles as he does and it's Saeko, his cat. Saeko *mrowls* at him in disappointment and blinks up from his lap before twisting back around and pacing to the corner of his bed where she knows he won't be going so he won't bother her again.

Hitoshi gets out of bed, showers, dresses, and generally gets ready for the day. It's like any other day so when he goes down the stairs to the second floor, to where his family's main room is, there is his little sister Hanashi making breakfast and his mother, Usoshi, talking with his elder sister, Nakushi, on the phone. He mumbles a greeting an opens the fridge for juice.

The last one up is always his little brother, Kokeshi, who comes stumbling in with his clothes askew and the imprint of his pillow still on his cheek.

Besides the infrequent, muffled buzzing alarm sound from below, breakfast is relatively quiet once his mother hangs up the phone. Kokeshi asks Hanashi half a dozen questions about homework and class things, but they talk softly and Hitoshi generally ignores them. Saeko comes wandering in as he finishes eating, so he gets her breakfast and goes to get coffee.

“We’re out this morning,” his mother says. “You’ll have to get some from downstairs.”

Hitoshi gives her a mournful look but she just arches one perfect eyebrow at him and says, “If someone didn’t insist on coffee with his dinner, we wouldn’t run out so much.”

Hitoshi grumbles, “Not for dinner, for my studying sessions.”

Still, he heads down to the first floor, where his father’s bakery is, and goes to make coffee from the espresso machine behind the counter. When it finishes, he goes back to the kitchen and stands in the doorway. His dad is in an apron and hat, singing along with one of his weird pop song playlists that are about thirty years out of date. The sun is just *barely* lighting up the eastern horizon but Kotae cheerfully greets Hitoshi, asking him about his school day.

The conversation lasts until the oven’s buzzer goes off, loud and jarring. It’s the same sound as the one that woke Hitoshi up; the same alarm that was heard through breakfast upstairs. He moves out of the way so his dad can fiddle with the baked treats and after another minute of watching, says goodbye and heads out of the room.

It’s still early when he decides to leave, bag slung over a shoulder, thumping lightly against his side with his step. He holds the strap with one hand, the other in his pocket. Hitoshi gets all the way to the school’s gates, feeling a little more sluggish than usual when it hits him.

His coffee.

He left it behind at the house.

Hitoshi’s shoulder sagged and he dragged his feet across the ground as he walked. Perhaps it was because of this slower walk that he had the

time to notice the other student. Usually, he was one of the only ones here at this time. It was quiet and still and Hitoshi liked the feeling of the school this early in the morning, still asleep, slowly waking. He usually would wander into the library or one of the quiet study rooms that were available, and busy himself until the first bells began to ring.

But today, another student was following him in through the gates, blond haired and walking briskly. Hitoshi glanced back and immediately recognized him from the Sport Festival only a week prior.

Bakugou didn't stop but slowed down and narrowed his eyes, looking at Hitoshi. He couldn't tell if the blond recognized him, after all, but he found himself standing there, about ten feet from the door. Silent and watching.

Bakugou approached, quiet as well, and absently lifted his thermos to his lips to drink. Whatever was in it made him sputter and curse, filling the air with his anger and making Hitoshi jump in surprise of how loud he was. "What the *fuck?"* Bakugou shouted at his thermos, looking at it in betrayal. He ripped off the lid and looked inside, groaning loudly. "Fucking hell, not again."

"Something wrong?" Hitoshi asked mildly.

Bakugou snapped the lid of his thermos back on and redirected his glare to Hitoshi. For a minute it looked like he wasn't going to say anything. People were often like that- not replying to Hitoshi in case he brainwashed them.

But then he did, growling out, "Why the fuck are you here so early if you look like shit?"

"Why the fuck are you here so early if you're just going to act like shit?" Hitoshi countered.

Bakugou snarled at him. He advanced on Hitoshi, who stood his ground with a stubborn lift to his chin and only a little tremor of fear in his limbs. He wasn't so much afraid of Bakugou hurting him as he was afraid of the possibility of it accidentally happening. After all, in some weird, twisted way, Bakugou was like him. Everyone thought Hitoshi was on the fast track to being a villain because of his quirk; everyone thought Bakugou was on his way to being a villain because of his quirk *and* his personality.

But he was here, training to be a hero. He was at school *early,* to study or something. Or maybe he couldn't sleep either. Maybe there was a bit more in common between than Hitoshi had known.

Either way, Bakugou stood in front of him with a growl, "It isn't any of your fucking business."

Which, really, it wasn't. So Hitoshi shrugged and said, "Then how I look isn't any business of yours, is it?"

Again a pause after he asked his question, but a much shorter one this time. Bakugou scoffed and shoved Hitoshi's chest with the flat of his palm. "Oh fuck off, if you're going to stand around where I can fucking see you, then I've got perfect rights to fucking notice you."

Hitoshi stumbled back a little, but caught his hand on the wall and straightened up. Bakugou was strong. Really strong. Rubbing at the middle of his chest, Hitoshi managed to straighten up and ask, "What kind of logic is that?"

Bakugou simply flipped him off, "I don't have time to fucking stand around and chatter with you, shithole. I got shit to do." He turned and stalked off, kicking open the school door with excessive force. Hitoshi rolled his eyes at his retreating back.

He figured it would be the last time that he saw Bakugou that day- really, it was rare to see him at all. They'd only just met at the Sport Festival a week prior.

And yet, not ten minutes later, Hitoshi was leaning against a window by a vending machine, drinking from a can of coffee, when, again, something caught his attention from the corner of his eye. This vending machine was pretty close to the outdoor gym area- the regular gym area that wasn't regularly torn up by heroes-in-training. There was a track ring, a few courts and other things outside, but usually, they were empty until the morning classes.

Turning to look, he saw Bakugou out on the field. He wore different clothing than the uniform he'd come to school in. It was a dark sleeveless shirt and lighter colored shorts- neither one of them Yuuei commissioned clothing. Hitoshi sipped his coffee as he watched Bakugou run laps.

After a few turns, Katsuki came to a stop by a bench where he picked up a towel and wiped his face. He seemed to look around for something and then smack himself in the forehead in annoyance.

Hitoshi looked also, but couldn't see anything out of place. Bakugou eventually went back to his running, though, and Hitoshi went back to watching him.

As he finished his drink, the little clues of this odd morning pieced together to form one whole picture that dawned on Hitoshi as he watched the other teen run in circles. Bakugou clearly hadn't been pleased with whatever was in his thermos that morning. Obviously, he was expecting something different. Then there he was, looking for something with his towel, maybe a drink of some sort? But there was nothing. So the thermos was useless.

Hitoshi's gaze slid over to the vending machine.

"No," he said to himself. "Don't do it."

He walked across and looked at the offered drinks. What would be the *best* choice, though?

"I'm totally gonna do it," he said, dropping a couple coins into the machine and pushing a button. The sports drink was cool in his hand as he picked it up. It wasn't much of a walk out to the field, either. The sun was a little higher in the sky and soon they wouldn't be the only two students wandering around. Bakugou was on the opposite side of the track as Hitoshi reached the bench he'd left his towel on. He set the bottle next to the towel and then, straightening up, put his hands in his pockets and waited.

Bakugou came to a jogging stop and then, warily, walked towards him. "The fuck do you want now, shitbrain?"

Hitoshi gestured to the bottle. "A thank you gift," he said with a little smirk.

Bakugou narrowed his eyes, "Yeah? For what?"

"Because of your performance at the Sport Festival last week, I am no longer the student body's number one choice for 'most likely to become a villain.' They all think it's you, now."

A flare and crack of an explosion went off in Bakugou's palm. "What the fuck did you say to me!?"

"Don't get me wrong," Hitoshi said, putting up his hands as if he could hold back Bakugou's anger with them. *"I* know you're not going to be a villain. That's more than obvious to me. But everyone else? They

love to talk and your explosive rage after your shitty match with Todoroki kind of shifted their attention to you." He patted his own chest with his fingers, "My class loves me now. But they can't stop talking about you."

Bakugou closes the distance, storming over. He snatches up the towel and the bottle and shakes the latter at Hitoshi. "I don't give a shit about you or your fucking class. Fuck off before I *make* you fuck off."

Hitoshi shrugged. "Fine. I said what I came to say. Thanks for being *such* an asshole that no one thinks I'm all that terrible anymore, Bakugou." He started backing up before Bakugou can shove him again. "See you around," he said cheekily as he left, waving at Bakugou, who cursed at his back.

Hitoshi discovered quickly that Bakugou came to the school that early almost every morning. He found this out when he stopped by that vending machine again and saw a blond headed figure running the track all by himself. He stayed by the window, watching from far enough away that he figured Bakugou wouldn't notice, and let his mind wander as Bakugou ran in large circles.

It's the fourth time that this happens that Hitoshi notices that Bakugou's bench is empty except for a towel. He's missing his drink- that thermos from before, probably full of iced water or some sort of sports drink from home, Hitoshi isn't sure which. Hitoshi finds himself buying another drink from the vending machine, his can of coffee still in hand, and walking back out of the school and onto the field.

Again, Bakugou sees him. Again, he comes jogging over, with narrowed eyes and a scowl. Hitoshi puts the bottle down next to the towel and turns to go back inside.

"Oi!"

Hitoshi stops. He doesn't exactly know if he really wants to deal with Bakugou, but he still stops. He turns and arches an eyebrow. "Yes?"

"What the fuck is your name?"

He opens his mouth to ask *"Are you kidding me?"* But it has been two

weeks since the Sport Festival and all the hero kids are a little self-centered, aren't they? Of course he doesn't remember Hitoshi's name. That and Bakugou has a weird expression on his face, some mix between pissed off and curious. Like an angry cat that kept poking its paws under the opening of a door, yowling in demand for entrance because it *must* know what you're doing behind that door *right now*.

It's a ridiculous image but somehow that irritable look really fits Bakugou this morning.

"Shinsou Hitoshi," he said.

Bakugou nods. He bends to pick up the water bottle. His shirt dips away from his chest when he does that, and the low neckline of the sleeveless cloth lets Hitoshi see down it. It's not like he can see much, but what little he can is defined muscle all the way down and, well. Damn. He thought Bakugou's shoulders were pretty nice on their own but if that was only a hint to the rest of him…

Hitoshi clears his throat, quickly turning away and drinking from his own can of coffee to keep from staring. He was obviously staring. That was definitely not a smart thing to do. Bakugou glares at him and uncaps his water bottle with a vicious little twist of his hand.

"You're out here a lot," Hitoshi said, starting a conversation he wasn't sure wouldn't blow up in his face- literally. "Do you really enjoy running?"

Bakugou snorts and tips the bottle back, drinking deeply from it. He lowers it with a little gasp and wipes across his mouth with the back of his hand. "Fuck no. It's boring as shit."

"Then-?" Hitoshi doesn't finish the sentence because Bakugou's glare has gone incredulous as if he can't quite believe that Hitoshi can't figure it out. And after actually spending a second to consider it, the reason is obvious. "Right. Heroes have to stay in shape so they can fight."

"Duh," Bakugou said. He capped the bottle again and put it down. "The fuck are you doing out here anyway?" He shook the bottle, "Is it just to give me this fucking thing? What bullshit reason do you have this time?"

Hitoshi shrugged, sipping from his own drink. "You looked thirsty. I figured you could use a drink."

Bakugou blinks at him, a single stunned second, and then glares. “Fuck off. I don’t need anything from you. The hell are you even doing here so fucking early, shitbrain?”

Hitoshi frowns at the insult. He did, after all, just give his name to Bakugou. There was no excuse for the other student to not know it anymore. “I don’t see how that’s any of your business, fuckface,” Hitoshi retorts, his voice as dry as a desert wind. He sips from his drink again, tipping it back so he can get the last drops out, while Bakugou grits his teeth.

When Hitoshi looks at him again, Bakugou’s lips are pulled back to bare his teeth like a dog. “Then leave. I don’t need to waste any fucking time on a general fucking student like you.” Bakugou took a threatening step forward. “Or are you such a damn idiot that I’ve gotta fucking kick you off the track myself?”

“That’s a bit contradictory,” Hitoshi couldn’t help but point out. “You don’t want to waste your time but you’ll kick me off yourself? Does that mean making me leave isn’t a waste of time but talking to me is?” It was surprisingly easy to stay somewhat calm in front of Bakugou. Hitoshi had seen those explosive hands before. He knew what kind of damage could be inflicted with them. So why rile up Bakugou, whom Hitoshi knew to be volatile and dangerous?

Bakugou sneered. “Getting rid of you would be productive,” he explained, “Talking to you is pointless. You haven’t got anything important to tell me.”

“Well that’s true,” Hitoshi agrees, mostly because he wants to see what that will do. “I *brought* you something, but it wasn’t my words.” He gave a sardonic little smile. “Most people don’t want me bringing my words anyway.”

The plastic bottle crinkles as Bakugou crunches it in his grip. He abruptly looks away, twisting the cap off the bottle again and taking another drink. When he finishes he shoots Hitoshi a glare that would certainly wound a weaker person. However, Hitoshi has to deal with the dead-eyed stare of his mother on a regular basis. He doesn’t even blink in response to this look.

Bakugou’s anger is all bluster. Even with his threatening, he hasn’t crossed the small space between them to actually physically engage with Hitoshi.

Whether it’s because he’s exercising remarkable restraint or because

he wants Hitoshi to instigate, it's hard to tell from his twitchiness. Bakugou screws the cap back on, drops the bottle on the bench next to his towel and said, "Like I fucking said, I don't need your damn charity. Next time keep it to your damn self, brainfucker."

That said, Bakugou apparently decides the conversation is over because he turns on his heel and heads back to the track. He returns to his workout, jogging at a steady pace while Hitoshi remains behind, idly watching him. When he's still standing there as Bakugou circles back around, the blond shouts at him to 'fuck off, creep' and Hitoshi finally turns to go.

The remaining weekdays are Bakugou free, causing Hitoshi to forget about him completely. Classes continue. Homework is given out and handed in. He works a few hours here and there behind the counter at the bakery. His elder sister visits. He updates his blog with pictures of cats. He prepares for his bike ride on Saturday.

Saturday is bright despite the clouds that drift across the sky. The light warms Hitoshi's skin as he pedals slowly up the street towards one of his favorite routes to ride. He doesn't get to go often because it takes some time to get there and the path itself is more difficult. But it's been a long week, and Hitoshi needs the air and the exercise so he can get out of his own head.

The mountain path starts with a slow incline; both hikers and bikers use the first part to start the climb up. After twenty minutes or so, the paths split. Hikers have a sharper incline to get to the mountain's top while bikers have a longer but more gradual incline track to follow.

Hitoshi rides up the path a little faster than he usually would. The burn of his muscles and the sharpness of his breath help clear his mind. All he sees is greenery and earth and it allows him to put aside everything else in his head that isn't *turn the handlebars, pump the pedals, breathe in, breathe out,* and *go, go, go, go.*

Time slips away as he climbs the mountain until he's not sure if it's been ten minutes or thirty or a whole hour. Sweat makes his shirt cling to his back and chest and exertion makes his legs tremble when he comes to a slow stop at an overlook near the top of the mountain.

The clearing is all green grasses and the occasional lichen covered rock. There is a half-hearted rock wall someone assembled years ago near the far edge. It's falling apart around the edges, but it serves its purpose in preventing people from walking right off the cliff.

Hitoshi comes to a stop at the edge of the clearing and climbs down off his bike. It's only when he is walking it further into the area, with the intention of leaning his bike on a rock and stopping for a while, that he notices he's not alone.

The other person is in the middle of a stretch; their back is to Hitoshi as they reach down to their toes. Their flexibility is pretty incredible, as Hitoshi can see a face between the knees and-

What, is Hitoshi's first thought. *Oh, you've gotta be kidding me,* is his second.

Bakugou straightens up and turns around. He's not scowling, but he doesn't exactly look pleased to see Hitoshi by his expression of a thin press of the lips and narrowed eyes. Bakugou looks Hitoshi over, his eyes flicking to the bike and then back.

There's a tense moment where it looks like Bakugou's going to say something, but he ends up clicking his tongue and turning away. Hitoshi accepts the silence and wheels over to the rock he'd picked out already. He unstraps a small bag from the back of his bike and fetches out fresh water from it.

For a while, the only human sounds around them are those of Hitoshi's drinking from the bottle and Bakugou's huffs of exertion from his stretches. After refreshing his parched throat, Hitoshi stretches out his legs and back. His watch says he's been out riding for the better part of three hours which explains why the heat has risen.

Hitoshi settles on the rock, legs criss-cross, and opens up his bag of light snacks. He looks up when he opens the first little bag because he hasn't heard anything from Bakugou for a while.

He finds Bakugou leaning back against a different rock with a book in one hand and a sandwich in the other. In the sunlight, his blond hair looks more honey-gold than pale and his skin has a slightly pink hue to it. When he's not running his mouth or scowling at the universe, Bakugou was quite handsome, Hitoshi realized with a little jolt. He had strong, distinctive features, and striking eyes to go along with them.

Plus, Hitoshi noted, Bakugou's body was fit. This was something he was aware of before now, but sitting still he could better see the way Bakugou looked. Bakugou chose to go sleeveless on this hike, and with that Hitoshi could see not only from shoulder to wrist but half his side as the shirt was loose and the hole for his arm large. Bakugou had dressed for the hot weather as much as Hitoshi had.

But where Hitoshi wore biking shorts- small and tight to make riding easier- Bakugou wore longer baggier ones.

Hitoshi's eyes jerked up from Bakugou's legs to his arms as he suddenly clued in on the fact that, even if Bakugou's cheeks might be red from sweating and working out, that pink shouldn't be on his arms too.

"Oi, fuckwit," Bakugou sneered. Hitoshi blinked and met his gaze. "The fuck are you staring at?"

Hitoshi swallowed his mouthful of food and gestured to Bakugou's arm with a lazy hand, "Looks like you've got a sunburn there. Didn't you put on sunscreen?"

"Tch," Bakugou said, "I'll be fine."

Hitoshi rolled his eyes. "You'll be a crustacean, but whatever." He ate another bite of his lunch, emptying his hand so he could dig around in his bag. Bakugou's pink skin reminded him that he probably had sweat off most of his own protection.

He found the sunscreen near the bottom of his bag and pulled it out. Popping another half of a rice ball into his mouth, Hitoshi absently wiped his hands on his shirt. Getting to his feet, Hitoshi used the rock to keep his leg up as he reapplied his own sunscreen. The lotion was cool as he coated his bare legs, making him shiver.

Once they were finished, he reapplied on his arms and his collarbone where his shirt collar left him exposed. His neck, face, and ears were the last point. Working in the cream as well as he could, Hitoshi capped the sunscreen and bent over to put it back in his bag. Glancing over his shoulder, he caught Bakugou looking at him, chewing his sandwich slowly.

Hitoshi arched an eyebrow.

Bakugou glared. "You missed a spot," he gestured to his own face to show where. Hitoshi reached up to feel for it, but apparently, his work

was unsatisfactory. Bakugou grunted and rose to his feet. Walking over, the blond tucked his book under one arm and reached up. “It’s right *here,* idiot. Can’t you fucking feel it?”

Bakugou rubbed his fingers over Hitoshi’s cheekbone, wiping them back towards his ear and working the sunscreen into Hitoshi’s skin.

Hitoshi stared at him, trying to think of something to say, anything at all. Even when Bakugou stood there, hand resting lightly on Hitoshi’s cheek, his tongue was heavy in his mouth, unmoving, inflexible.

Bakugou jerked his hand back sharply but covered the motion by wiping his fingers off on Hitoshi’s shirt.

Somehow, the pressure of his fingers on Hitoshi’s sleeve, caused Hitoshi’s jaw to unhinge. “You can borrow mine if you need it,” he said, ducking his head so he didn’t keep staring into those red, red eyes. He reached down for his bag. “It’s got good coverage and you really should or else you’ll burn.”

Holding out the container, Hitoshi made himself meet Bakugou’s gaze again. He wasn’t going to show weakness or fear to the other teen. Even if that weakness was in his knees. Even if that fear was over the way his stomach clenched at the sight of Bakugou’s face, at the sight of Bakugou looking at him without a scowl but something… else.

“Fine,” Bakugou said, taking the bottle. He stepped away to use it, turning his back on Hitoshi. He was efficient in his application, getting his arms and collarbone quickly although he skipped his legs entirely. When he handed the container back, Hitoshi saw that Bakugou had missed a few places on his own face.

Hitoshi took the sunscreen with one hand and lifted his other, “You’ve got a bit…”

Bakugou frowned, but lifted his chin and closed his eyes. “Get it,” he said.

Hitoshi rubbed the lotion into Bakugou’s skin. He did his best to ignore how warm the skin was under his fingers or how smooth it felt. He finished Bakugou’s face and saw a bit on his ear that had been missed as well. Without thinking about it, he worked the lotion there as well. Bakugou stiffened under his touch but didn’t pull away or otherwise move.

“Did you get the back of your neck?” Hitoshi found himself asking,

fingers still rubbing even though there was nothing left on Bakugou's ear.

A red eye opened and glared at him. "Fuck you," he said, "Give me the bottle back."

He reached for it but Hitoshi tightened his grip. "I can do it," he said, "Then you won't miss a spot again."

Bakugou's other eye opened slowly. He stared at Hitoshi in utter silence before clicking his tongue and turning around.

Hitoshi rubbed the sunscreen into the back of Bakugou's neck. The skin was warm there, too, and had a little less give. Bakugou's muscles from his back ran up to his neck and made it firmer than the soft give of his cheeks. Hitoshi wondered if it was the same for his whole back; if the defined muscle that he had seen glimpses of on Bakugou's chest and side were also present on his back.

What are you thinking about, Hitoshi? He asked himself as his fingers trailed down those few inches of the spine. *Get over yourself. It's not like he's more in shape than anyone else you know. Plus he's an egocentric asshole who can't control his temper! Do not think about how much you want to touch his body. Seriously. Stop.*

Hitoshi ended up yanking his hand back as though Bakugou's skin burned him. He had been rubbing too hard for it to just be working in the lotion. He took a step back, but there was nowhere to really go. His heel caught on the rock and he sat, hard, on it. Hitoshi hissed in pain, wincing at it.

Bakugou looked over his shoulder at him, but only for a second. He walked away quickly, without a thank you, without any words at all, and sat down with his back to Hitoshi. Staring at his own hand, Hitoshi wondered what the hell was up with himself that morning. Had he eaten something weird? Had Bakugou? Was he suffering from heat stroke? Dehydration? Something else?

Sighing, Hitoshi busied himself with putting away the sunscreen and drinking some from his water bottle. There wasn't much reason to linger after that and so Hitoshi got up and stretched out one more time before walking back to his bike. As he turned it around to get it ready to ride again, he glanced over towards where Bakugou sat.

Sitting in grass that went up to his elbow, Bakugou's head was tilted back, his face turned towards the sky. He was quiet; a fact that Hitoshi

realized had been true the whole time during this encounter. Sure, Bakugou had been blunt and borderline aggressive but he hadn't shouted. He hadn't entirely broken the feeling of the mountain around them.

Hitoshi stared a little longer, watching the way the light shifted over Bakugou's skin. The sun dipped behind a cloud and then out again in the time that he watched, dimming the light and then reinvigorating its brightness as it lit up the curve of Bakugou's shoulders and brought out the deeper colors of his light colored hair.

He couldn't see Bakugou's face but he imagined it to be calm. Closed eyes and relaxed expression. Maybe similar to how he looked asleep-

"I'm leaving now," Hitoshi said out loud. He had to do *something* because his mind was absolutely running away from him.

Bakugou grunted in acknowledgment but didn't move.

Letting out a breath that felt too heavy, Hitoshi got on his bike and left the clearing. He couldn't stay, even if his muscles were strained from his ride already. Being around Bakugou was making him weird.

Hitoshi had to avoid him for sure after this.

actions lead to habits

Hitoshi followed his elder sister under the awning and into the small hole-in-the-wall restaurant. Without any lit-up signage, it was easy to miss the place. He hadn't seen it until they were nearly at the front door. It was located down at the end of a narrow street that only allowed foot traffic, but Nakushi walked right to it without any hesitation. Hitoshi glanced at the people they passed, but there didn't seem to be anyone suspicious.

"How did you find out about this place again?" He asked as his eyes adjusted to the dimmer light on the inside. There were a few patrons in there, sitting with bowls in front of themselves and talking quietly. Two of them, off in the corner, seemed to be racing on who could eat the fastest.

"A friend of mine told me about it *ages* ago," Nakushi explained. "I've been coming here since high school."

Hitoshi was surprised at the size of the room and less surprised about the amount of seating crammed into such a small space. It had a communal dining sort of feeling, with long tables lined with benches or stools instead of chairs. There were a few smaller tables and a booth or two along the edge as well as a bar.

Even though it was just about three in the afternoon, the place had a decent amount of customers. But Nakushi didn't even bother taking a seat at a table. She went right to the bar, urging Hitoshi to sit down beside her.

He had a choice between sitting between her and a stranger on his left or a stranger on his right. The left was an older gentleman slowly eating from a fresh bowl. The right was a teenager, waiting with his chin in his palm and fingers drumming on the counter.

Hitoshi stared at the other teenager. That blond hair and those shoulders looked vaguely familiar but he couldn't quite pinpoint why. Nakushi pointed more enthusiastically to the stool beside herself, "Hitoshi, c'mon we can't order until you sit down!"

The seated teen jolted and turned to look at them and, fuck. Hitoshi *had* recognized that blond hair after all. Red eyes flicked from Hitoshi to Nakushi and back. The stool that Nakushi was pointing to was the one between her and Bakugou. Hitoshi sighed and walked up.

Looking at Bakugou he asked, “Is this seat taken?”

Bakugou rolled his eyes, “I’m not the one on a damn date, asshole.”

“She’s my sister, Bakugou,” Hitoshi explained as he sat down on the stool. Nakushi leaned forward to look past him at Bakugou. She waved, grinning at Bakugou. “Her name is Nakushi.”

“Hey, you’re that kid, aren’t you?” She said, “The fighty one from the sports festival. That was quite the show! We weren’t sure you’d manage to pull it off in the end against that other kid with the hair.” Nakushi gestured to her own hair as she spoke. Her hands moved quickly, flighty as a bird. “But then he went and all but forfeit the match on you! That was crazy!”

Almost in the same breath, she turned towards the man behind the bar who had walked over to take their order. She didn’t even ask Hitoshi what he wanted, just ordered for them both. Hitoshi sighed.

“Fucking weird-ass sister you got there,” Bakugou said, sitting up a little straighter. Hitoshi refused to look directly at him. He hadn’t been this close to Bakugou since the mountain incident. He hadn’t even seen Bakugou since the mountain incident- at least not in the flesh. Hitoshi pressed his hands down against the counter but the smooth wood did nothing to help him forget the feeling of Bakugou’s skin. “That damn festival was three weeks ago.”

“You made quite the impression,” Hitoshi said dryly. “Or do you forget the award ceremony where they had to chain you up so you’d even take the medal?”

Bakugou sneered and looked away. “Fuck off about that shit.”

Nakushi, done with ordering, jumped back into the conversation as though she hadn’t even left. “It was such a close match between all you first years this time! Everyone was sure that one kid would win, the crowd favorite, what was his name?” She snapped her fingers, “The one who broke his arm?”

“Midoriya,” Hitoshi supplied. He glanced over and saw Bakugou had gone very still.

“Yeah. My friend bet on him winning so of *course* I went with his rival. Shinji, you remember Shinji, right Hitoshi? Anyway, Shinji was sure that Endeavor’s kid was going to sweep the joint but man he was *so* disappointed with the final match.” Nakushi continued on,

chattering brightly, “But Todoroki just wasn’t as creative as Midoriya or had the same gumption as you, uh, it's Bakugou, right?”

“Right,” Hitoshi confirmed.

“He was too rigid. It was good that Midoriya beat some sense into him, even though it really seemed to fuck up his arms.” Nakushi said.

In an undertone, Bakugou asked, “Does she ever stop?” His hand was a fist on the counter.

Hitoshi shook his head. “She’s spent too much time with birds. They can talk over each other pretty often and so she just picked up the habit.” He looked at his sister, happily talking about her friend’s predictions and analysis of the sports festival, and then to Bakugou. “She doesn’t like it to be quiet.”

“Fucking weird,” Bakugou muttered. Hitoshi chose to ignore him.

The chef came over a minute later, carrying a large bowl. He placed it down in front of Bakugou, who sighed out a “fucking finally” and began to dig in without much fanfare. As he ate, he completely ignored Hitoshi and Nakushi.

Nakushi’s story had turned into something about her friends and their own sport festivals. Hitoshi had heard the story before so he listened with only half an ear while looking around behind the bar. The menu was surprisingly simple and was written on a chalkboard off to the right. Above that chalkboard was a poster that declared this restaurant to be the one with the spiciest noodles in the city.

“Oh, look!” Nakushi exclaimed, pulling Hitoshi’s gaze from the wall. They were being served their own bowls of ramen. He nodded his thanks and then took up his chopsticks.

“I’ve been looking forward to this all month,” Nakushi said with absolute relish before digging in herself.

Hitoshi could feel Bakugou’s gaze on the side of his head. It was weird how that worked. Bakugou’s attention had a feeling to it, unlike everyone else Hitoshi knew.

Of course, that might be because Hitoshi had a special awareness of Bakugou and Bakugou’s body and Bakugou’s attention. An awareness that he wasn’t exactly sure when he picked up or how to get rid of.

“Yes?” He asked Bakugou, turning towards him.

Bakugou noisily slurped up his noodles and gestured towards their bowls. “You like spicy food?”

Hitoshi blinked and looked down at his bowl. Finally actually paying attention to it, he could smell the aroma. The capsaicin was a sudden punch in the face, making Hitoshi’s eyes water. “Nakushi!” He said, “What did you order me?”

“Eh?” She blinked and swallowed her own mouthful. “Why, the same as me!” She pointed up to the laminated sign Hitoshi had just been looking at. “The super spicy supreme! It’s the best dish here.”

“I don’t eat spicy food like this,” Hitoshi hissed, “You know that.”

Nakushi’s innocent expression broke under the force of her grin, “I guess *someone else* will have to eat it for you and you’ll have to order something else, huh?” She pointed to herself when she said *‘someone else’* , clearly indicating who she thought that should be.

“What a fucking bitch,” Bakugou said from Hitoshi’s other side. Frankly, Hitoshi really wanted to agree with the other teen. Nakushi just laughed at the insult.

Hitoshi looked to Bakugou, “Do you like spicy food? Do you want a second bowl?”

“Hell yeah,” Bakugou said immediately. “If only to keep her fucking hands off it. Gimme.” He reached out, taking Hitoshi’s bowl while Nakushi made a show of pouting. Hitoshi ignored her, calling out to the chef to make another order.

When he was done, Hitoshi settled in to wait some more. Bakugou was eating with gusto now, hoarding his two bowls to himself. Nakushi elbowed Hitoshi to get his attention. Hitoshi looked up at his sister and inwardly winced. She smirked at him. She looked pointedly to Bakugou and then back to her brother, saying quietly, “That’s pretty sweet of you to share your food with him, Hitoshi.”

“Do. Not.” Hitoshi said firmly.

Nakushi snickered. “Why, you won't share your meal with your sweet sister, who is paying for your meal, but you’ll give it to this little friend of yours?”

“We’re not friends,” Hitoshi said, “We just keep running into each other.”

“Oh *ho?”* Nakushi said. There was a glint in her eyes that made Hitoshi immediately regret saying anything at all to her about Bakugou. “That sounds like fate to me~”

“It *sounds* like we go to the same school, Naku,” Hitoshi said. “I run into a lot of people on a regular basis because *we go to the same school.”*

“But don’t you usually run into those people while you’re at school? Not tooling around the city with your best big sis?” She elbowed him while she teased. “Do you want me to go so you two can chat?”

“We have nothing to chat about,” Hitoshi said.

This statement was punctuated by Bakugou’s noisy slurping as he sucked up a huge mouthful of noodles. Hitoshi ignored the slurping even as his sister wrinkled her nose at Bakugou’s display.

Hitoshi was saved from any conversation when his bowl of food was slid into place before him. He thanked the chef before digging in. Nakushi rolled her eyes and sighed, but did the same.

It was comfortable sitting and eating with the two of them. Hitoshi was used to eating in a group, having had siblings at the table for as long as he could remember. Even though he’d never eaten with Bakugou before, and never expected to again, the silent company was… nice. Not for the first time, Hitoshi was having a pretty nice time next to Bakugou.

In retrospect, the school meetings probably didn’t count all that much. Hitoshi usually only went out to see Bakugou tease him a little or because he’d forgotten his water. Bakugou usually yelled at him or said something insulting. Well, except that one time where he’d just gruffly said thanks and then downed a few mouthfuls of water, while a line of it trickled down his jaw and dripped from his chin-

Hitoshi blinked. He shook his head, realizing he was just staring at his food, not even really seeing or eating it, and hurriedly dug into the noodles again. The ramen here was excellent and he could understand why his sister brought him. Even without much liking spicy food, he could smell what Nakushi and Bakugou were having and, well, it didn’t smell *too* bad. They certainly liked it well enough.

A bit of motion in the corner of his eye caught Hitoshi's attention. Bakugou held his first bowl in his hands and was drinking from the edge. He took periodic breaks, exhaling through his nose, and for some reason, Hitoshi couldn't really look away. There was something about the way Bakugou's face was partially obscured, something about the way he cradled the bowl in his hands, something about how the broth beaded at the corner of his lips and dripped down-

Nakushi's laughter made Hitoshi realize he was staring. Like *staring* staring. He quickly turned away and shoved noodles into his mouth while his sister giggled maniacally beside him. Shooting a glare her way, he tried to get her to shut up with his eyes, but of course she didn't listen. She instead wiped her mouth with a napkin and said lightly, "I'm so glad we could run into your friend, Hitoshi. It's always nice to have lunch with the people you like."

Hitoshi kicked her ankle under the bar. She laughed at him again, not even acting like it hurt. He heard Bakugou set down his bowl and his spine went stiff in resisting turning around to look at him.

"I don't like him," Hitoshi said quietly to her. "We just go to the same school. Sometimes, we both go early to school."

"Oh that's the best time to hang out," Nakushi said. "Before classes, you have time and energy and it's such a nice time to chill. What do you two usually do together?"

"Nothing," Hitoshi snapped.

"Mostly nothing," Bakugou said.

Hitoshi closed his eyes for a moment. He hadn't thought Bakugou the type to be honest when in the face of a nosy elder sibling, but then again, he had no idea if Bakugou even understood what kind of monstrosity an elder sibling could be to the social life and well-being of a younger sibling. And Nakushi, with all her good intentions, was definitely out to Uncover the Truth.

"Mostly nothing?" Nakushi said, light and curious. "What does that mean?"

"I go to the school to run," Bakugou said, "The track there is pretty fucking decent and that way I don't have to worry about cars or running into Deku in the fucking morning by accident. Sometimes, this asshole brings me a sports drink. That's what that means."

Hitoshi put his face in his hands.

“He buys you sports drinks?”

“He’s a little fuck about it but yeah.”

“Hitoshi buys you sports drinks? From like, the vending machine?”

“Yeah. Where the hell else would he get them?”

“Every morning?”

“No. Not every fucking morning. I fucking said ‘sometimes’, didn’t I?”

“Why not every morning?”

“I don’t fucking know.”

From behind his hands, Hitoshi said, “Some mornings he forgets his thermos. That’s when I buy the sports drinks.” It was over. It was over. Nakushi would never forget Bakugou now- not because of the festival, but because Hitoshi bought him drinks. As if that mattered at all in any way!

“Ohh,” Nakushi said thoughtfully. “That’s so sweet, Hitoshi. You’re really looking out for your friend!”

“We’re not friends,” Hitoshi said, lowering one hand so he could glare at his sister. “We don’t have the same classes and he’s an arrogant asshole and we don’t ‘hang out’ before school.” He used air quotes with one hand, “We barely even talk to each other. I don’t know why I even buy the drinks.”

“Because you care,” Nakushi said, as if it was the simplest and most obvious thing in the world, “And you shouldn’t be so mean to your friend! Calling him an arrogant asshole, that’s so rude! Be nice to your friend!” She waved a finger at Hitoshi as she scolded him.

Hitoshi groaned. He instinctively turned to Bakugou and looked pleadingly at him, “Can you believe her?”

Bakugou swallowed his mouthful of spicy noodles and shrugged a shoulder. “She’s an idiot. It’s obvious we’re not fucking friends. Why the fuck would I be friends with someone like you.”

“Why the hell did you tell her any of that shit anyway?” Hitoshi asked, “It’s your fault she thinks that we’re friends.”

“She bought lunch,” Bakugou said, as if that explained anything, while he gestured to his second bowl. A brief, but vicious little smile crossed his face a second later, “And cause you’re a fucking arrogant asshole yourself. A fucking dumb one too.”

“Oh screw you,” Hitoshi muttered. He turned back to his bowl and obstinately ignored his sister’s laughter or Bakugou’s noisy eating. He didn’t need their nonsense in his life. It was obvious that Bakugou was the fucking asshole and his sister was just being annoying on purpose. He just had to suffer through it until it was over and they all went their separate ways.

Hitoshi was suddenly very glad that his sister had moved out to go to college, thinking that the only way this meeting could possibly go worse was for her to be able to go home and tell his parents about his ‘little friend’.

Pff, he thought with a roll of his eyes, *as if anyone could be friends with Bakugou.*

Hitoshi, being the last to receive his food, was the last to finish. He pushed away his bowl with a satisfied smile. The bowl was taken away as he turned around on his stool, getting ready to leave.

Bakugou had finished a few minutes before and had left without much of a fuss, for which Hitoshi was grateful for. Had he stuck around, who knows what Nakushi would have-

Hitoshi blinked, realizing that Nakushi had wandered off too. Where had she gone again? He vaguely remembered her finishing her bowl and saying she’d meet up with him outside. He’d been using his food to ignore the pair of them, sure, but he couldn’t remember if she’d left at the same time as-

Oh no.

Hitoshi hurriedly left the little hole in the wall restaurant. As he approached the doorway he could hear his sister’s chattering voice and the horror in his gut rose to his throat.

He stepped out into the sunlight to see Nakushi talking to Bakugou a few feet down. He had his hands in his pockets and looked kind of, dare Hitoshi even say it, *interested.* Nakushi’s hands fluttered as she spoke. Her words became clear as Hitoshi approached the two of

them.

"... bracing effects. It's not something a lot of people think of before they really get on the job," Nakushi said, "especially since not every quirk can get you up that high, but anything can happen and there are all sorts of villains and all sorts of quirks that can get you airborne in ridiculous ways. Hey, Hitoshi! About time you finished!" She finished with a wave to him. "You ready to get some ice cream?"

"Ice cream?" Hitoshi asked worriedly, looking from her to Bakugou and back. What were they talking about?

Nakushi nodded, "Bakugou's treat. He said he usually goes to get some after he comes here 'cause there's a good place just around the corner. C'mon!" She started walking, not even waiting for Hitoshi's response.

Hitoshi blinked after her. After a moment, he asked Bakugou, "Your treat?"

"If you don't want it, you don't have to get it," Bakugou said. "It's up to you, I'm not going to force-feed you fucking ice cream." With that, he walked after Nakushi, who had already noticed they were lingering and was waving to them to hurry up.

Bewildered, Hitoshi followed.

In the end, Hitoshi got an ice cream. It was just a cone with a couple scoops on top and in the warm air it started to melt almost immediately, but it *was* good and if he pretended that Bakugou didn't buy it for him, gruffly asking what he wanted and urging him to get two scoops with a 'don't fucking flake out now' comment that was strangely compelling, he could certainly enjoy it without any weird fluttering or sneaked glances at Bakugou or utter confusion on *how the hell Nakushi convinced him to do this.*

He didn't like that Nakushi had had time to talk to Bakugou without him there. He didn't like the conspiring feeling that he got when he

saw them amiably talk together. He didn't like feeling so paranoid as he tried to enjoy his ice cream but what the *hell.*

Hitoshi finally was able to relax when he and his sister parted ways with Bakugou, her waving and smiling and making a nuisance of herself while he and Bakugou exchanged brief nods. Hitoshi let out a long-suffering sigh when Bakugou vanished into the crowded street. His sister's exuberance was *exhausting.* He almost wished he could be the one walking away.

"You know what I think?" she asked. She actually paused after she did so, looking at Hitoshi with a faint smile. Her unusual quietness disturbed Hitoshi.

"No," he said, "I don't."

Her smile became sly. "You know Mom and Dad are always worrying about whether or not you have any friends… Don't they always say you should bring home your friends to introduce them?"

Hitoshi's stomach clenched. "Nakushi, don't you *dare.* "

She gave him a pat on the shoulder. "I'm not gonna tell them, Hitoshi, but you should consider inviting him over before anything too serious happens!"

"What do you mean by that?" Hitoshi demanded. "I already told you that-"

"You're not friends, I know, I know." She gave a shrug and turned to start walking to the station, "But that's only because you don't want to be! Katsuki's definitely open to that possibility!"

"There's no way that's happening," he said, "We're too different. He's in the hero course and I'm stuck in General. He's got a whole room of people on his level to be friends with." Hitoshi hurried to keep pace with Nakushi, who walked quickly despite being shorter than him. "Besides, have you forgotten the 'he's an arrogant asshole' part?"

"So what you're in two different classes. You can still meet outside if class!"

"You saw what he was like at the award ceremony for the sports festival. You've heard how he talks, Naku, he's vulgar, aggressive, angry and violent. He's a walking time bomb waiting to go off." Hitoshi ticked off the words on his fingers, ending with a gesture of an

explosion. He was so caught up with his explanation that he nearly walked right into her as she abruptly stopped and spun around.

Nakushi stood in front of him, hands on her hips and said, “What, are you saying he’s just a villain waiting to happen?”

Hitoshi opened his mouth to reply but Nakushi spoke right over him.

“Isn’t that what everyone says about *you?”*

Hitoshi’s mouth shut with a snap.

Nakushi stared him down, expression firm, for a good thirty seconds before she lowered her hands and sighed. “Hitoshi,” she said gently, stepping closer and putting her hands on his shoulders, “I get that you don’t want to be caught up with someone people think is bad, but that kid is lonely. He wants a friend. You could be that friend.”

“He’s not lonely,” Hitoshi countered, but his words had barely any strength to them and he couldn’t look his sister in the eye, “He’s got his friends in his hero class and-” He stopped when Nakushi shook him.

She ducked her head down and forced him to look her in the face, “Use your brains, Hitoshi. The guy was out on a beautiful Saturday *by himself*. We meet him by chance and instead of boot scoot boogying at the first available opportunity, he sticks it out with you, a guy who insists isn’t his friend despite buying him stuff, and me, some random lady he’s never met nor heard of before. He told us about his ice cream place, Hitoshi! He bought us ice cream!”

Hitoshi resolutely stared at her chin instead of her eyes. He didn’t say anything, just frowned and stared and didn’t move. Nakushi was making sense. Why did she have to make sense?

She ruffled his hair with one hand and stepped to the side. He scowled at her, but she ignored that with a smile. Linking her arm through his, she began to walk with him down the street again. Hitoshi kept frowning as he walked with her.

The silence only lasted a minute or two before something flitted through Nakushi’s attention and she started her chatter up again but since it *wasn’t* about Bakugou, Hitoshi was able to give replies when necessary.

He didn’t stop thinking about what she said, though.

As one of the highest-ranked kids in the highest-ranked class, as the victor to the school's biggest festival and the rising star of Yuuei's first years, as fit and strong and skilled as he'd proven himself to be… was Bakugou lonely?

With all that attention, with all those accolades, with that massive ego of his- did Bakugou long for a friend of his own?

Hitoshi couldn't say for sure.

He just didn't know Bakugou well enough.

It was the middle of the next week before Hitoshi saw Bakugou again.

He'd been having trouble getting to sleep since Nakushi had put that worm in his brain. That plus some extra essays from a sadistic teacher (He was just joking. They probably weren't really sadistic.) meant late nights and late mornings as he shuffled off the coils of fitful sleep and dragged himself to school.

So he'd missed the last few mornings where he'd sit by his favorite vending machine and watch Bakugou run- and bring him a drink if he'd managed to forget his own.

Hitoshi thought nothing of it, of course. His Bakugou viewing was a weird thing he did that he didn't tell anyone about. He figured Bakugou didn't really care if he was there or not, didn't really notice him unless he came out with a drink offering. And sometimes he just didn't go over there and watch. It was a creepy thing to do. Hitoshi knew it was creepy. So he tried not to do it.

It was lunchtime and he was eating at his desk, as he usually did, reading through an assignment they'd been given that morning in order to get a headstart on it, when he heard a strange ripple of silence and muted horror wash over his classroom. About half of the kids had stayed inside today, pushing desks together to eat in groups with each other. As a result, the normally straight rows were riddled

with islands and the space directly around Hitoshi was much bigger than usual.

Hitoshi picked out a bit of sausage from his bento, lifted it to his mouth, and casually looked up to see what the silence was about. Someone had left the door open, as usual, and in it stood- In it stood-

Bakugou stood in the doorway.

Staring at him.

As if making eye contact was what Bakugou was waiting for, he strode into the room, red eyes focused on Hitoshi. He didn't look *angry* per say, but his attention was focused and his lips pressed into a thin, grim line. Hitoshi was glad he hadn't actually managed to get his food into his mouth because he was pretty sure he would have started choking on it the minute Bakugou came into the room.

A deathly silence held the rest of the students captive as Bakugou came to a stop in front of Hitoshi's desk.

He lifted his hand and in it, he held a can of coffee. From the vending machine.

That's my favorite kind, Hitoshi thought distantly. It was from his favorite vending machine. That machine was the only one on campus that carried this particular flavor. Had Bakugou actually noticed that was the same brand that he'd held? Or was this a lucky guess?

Bakugou set the can on Hitoshi's desk, in front of his bento. Hitoshi stared at it and then stared back up at him.

"What's this for?" he asked.

Bakugou leaned forward and tapped the top of the can, "I don't like owing debts."

Hitoshi blinked, "What?"

"That bitch said I owed you and she was fucking right so here." He tapped the can again and then leaned back, "Now I owe you one less."

"No one's-" Hitoshi started, then stopped, then lowered his chopsticks to his bento and hissed, "I'm not so petty as to keep score, Bakugou."

He made a big show of rolling his eyes and said, "Whatever." Then he jammed his hands into his pockets and turned away. Hitoshi was torn

between being offended and genuinely hurt that Bakugou would think that he was, what, tallying debts? Collecting favors? When he gave the other student drinks.

Hitoshi gave those because he felt like it and for no other reason.

He didn't feel like Bakugou owed him anything and, if the exchange was ever in Bakugou's favor, he *certainly* wouldn't feel like he owed Bakugou anything in return!

Bakugou stalked back out the open doorway without making any more of a scene than he already had. Hitoshi felt his classmates turn from the doorway toward him, almost as one hive mind. They stared at the can on his desk and at him.

Hitoshi ignored them, picked up the can and popped the tab. It was a little warmer than he would have liked, about room temperature, though that wasn't too bad. It was quite a walk from the vending machine to his classroom and -

Hitoshi paused in sipping the can. He lowered it and stared at it.

The coffee was room temperature.

Bakugou didn't just get this from the vending machine and bring it over.

He'd bought it that morning.

He must have. After or before his run, probably, when he was over there by the vending machine and-

Bakugou had thought of him. When he wasn't there to be a visible reminder. When he'd been alone. He'd thought of him and-

Hitoshi hadn't been there for a few days. Had Bakugou… Had Bakugou *missed* him?

No.

Of course not.

Hitoshi brought the can back up to his lips and drank slowly. Of course Bakugou didn't miss him. He hadn't said as much. He'd just talked about owing Hitoshi for a drink, which, fine, Hitoshi had gotten him a few without any reciprocation - not that he'd asked for it or expected it really- but he had given that as his reason and-

Hitoshi lowered the drink and set it down on his desk. He stared at it for a while and then whispered, “What the fuck.”

“That’s what I’d like to know.”

Hitoshi jumped and looked up at one of his classmates. Her name was Tanya and she sat three chairs in front of him, though now she stood in front of his desk with one hand on her hip and her head tilted to the side. She was pretty unremarkable, almost aggressively so, except for the long braid she wore day in and day out. It went down to her hips.

She grinned at him and said, “So what’s up with Bakugou, eh Shinsou? C’mon. That’s gotta be a story worth telling!”

Hitoshi frowned at her. On the one hand, it was nice that his classmates weren’t as utterly afraid of him as they used to be. On the other hand, Tanya had always been nosy about his life, about everyone’s life. She’d just kept her distance before the sports festival.

“It’s nothing,” he said, “Don’t worry about it.”

“Oh I’m not worried,” she said with a shrug, “I’m just curious. What’s it like getting close to Explodokill himself without getting exploded or killed?”

Hitoshi’s frown turned into a scowl. He went back to his eating, ignoring her completely.

Tanya tried a few more prying questions, but honestly, Hitoshi had heard and dealt with far worse before. Eventually, she got bored and left him alone but he didn’t like the way the others whispered or glanced at him.

Great. Just great.

This was all Bakugou’s fault.

The second time Bakugou shows up at Hitoshi’s classroom during lunch, it isn’t silence that heralds his arrival. It’s a flurry of hushed

whispering and giggling.

Hitoshi was finishing up something from the last class before digging into his lunch, so he's only just fished out his bento and unwrapped it when the whispering reaches a weird fever pitch and his instinct tells him to look up.

Again the door is open.

Again Bakugou stands there.

Again he's holding a can of coffee.

Hitoshi can feel the tension in the room rising the moment Bakugou starts walking into the room. He managed to foist off all his classmate's questions yesterday, but he'd still had the ones in his head to deal with.

He wanted some answers and some weird drop-off and vague bullshit about *owing debts* wasn't going to cut it this time.

Hitoshi lurched to his feet and marched towards Bakugou. Bakugou, for some reason, looked surprised as he met him halfway to the door, and even more surprised when Hitoshi grabbed him by the arm and began to pull him back to the door.

He managed to get Bakugou into the hallway without any problems and he promptly shut the door to the classroom so that any eavesdropping had to be done with at least a little skill. Then he turned to Bakugou, ready to demand answers.

Instead, what he got was Bakugou getting into his space, glaring at him and poking him in the chest with that can of coffee, "What the fuck do you think you're doing?" he demanded.

"What the fuck do you think *you're* doing?" Hitoshi retorted.

Bakugou's eyes narrowed, "It's none of your business."

"Are you fucking kidding me?" Hitoshi snapped, "You waltz into my classroom, drop off your weird gift and it's *not* my business?"

"It's a can of coffee," Bakugou said, "It's not fucking weird."

"No. But *you* are," Hitoshi said, "What are you thinking right now?"

There was a split second where Bakugou's gaze flicks to the side with

a certain kind of uncertainty that makes Hitoshi wonder if *Bakugou* even has a clue what he's doing. Then Bakugou's defense mechanism cuts in and that worried look is burnt away as he aggressively pokes Hitoshi in the chest again, almost hard enough to hurt, and snarls, "Fuck you. I don't have to fucking explain myself to you."

"No you don't but I would appreciate it if you would!" Hitoshi said, "What the hell are you doing? Why are you doing it? What the fuck, Bakugou?"

"I told you why already," Bakugou's voice was a low growl, "I don't like owing people shit."

"Well you don't owe me shit," Hitoshi replied, "Those drinks were *gifts* , Bakugou. Gifts don't require reciprocation."

"Fuck off with that," Bakugou said, "Gifts are bribery with a different fucking name."

"I'm not trying to bribe you," Hitoshi said, "And where did you come up with that shit anyway?"

Another flicker of uncertainty. This time, instead of swearing at him, Bakugou just shoves the can against him and lets go of it, forcing Hitoshi to grab it or let it fall. He holds it in his hand, again noticing that the can was warm, not cool, and stares bewilderingly at Bakugou.

Bakugou takes a step back.

Hitoshi can't help it. He has to know. He has to ask.

He lifts the can up slightly and asks, "Did you buy it this morning?"

Bakugou goes stiff. He lifts his chin stubbornly. "So what if I did?"

Oh no.

Hitoshi hadn't made it to school early this morning either. He'd barely gotten any sleep the night before.

The moment between them is stretched tight like a tuned string on a violin. Hitoshi stares at Bakugou, unsure of what to say next. Unsure of what to do next. Bakugou stares back at him with such barely restrained hostility that Hitoshi almost doesn't notice how his hands open and close restlessly at his sides. Instead of thinking that Bakugou's resisting the urge to attack him, he thinks of his cat and the

way she'll bristle if frightened.

Bakugou's not just aggressive. He's anticipating an attack.

Hitoshi takes in a deep breath and then lets it out slowly. Bakugou's eyes narrow and then abruptly widen as Hitoshi gives him a partial bow.

"Thank you for the gift," Hitoshi said quietly, "And my apologies for not thanking you yesterday."

As he straightens up, he expects- Well he expects *something.* Maybe for Bakugou to laugh or to tell him it's nothing or to get mad or anything but what he does do.

Which is blink dumbly at Hitoshi and then turn on his heel and run away.

Okay, so he wasn't actually running, but even with that fast walk, his hunched shoulders screamed *I'm fleeing! I'm fleeing!* loud and clear.

Hitoshi stood there for a few seconds in silent confusion before the door to the room opened and there were his classmates crowding around with Tanya in the forefront.

"Seriously, Shinsou," she said, "You've *got* to tell us what is going on!"

"I have no idea," Hitoshi said faintly.

And he really didn't, either.

Exhausted, cold and grouchy because of it, Hitoshi's internal struggle to get another hour's worth of rest, if not sleep, is real. The only reason he manages to drag himself out of bed and to the school as early as he does is a certainty in his gut that if he doesn't, Bakugou will be in his classroom at lunch again.

He's already had to explain to Tanya, and the others listening in, that sometimes he and Bakugou bump into each other and sometimes that means he buys him something from a vending machine. She'd wanted

more details, of course, but Hitoshi was still the master at ignoring bullshit he didn't want to listen to. At least he was from the outside.

His brain was riddled with all his questions as well as the ones Tanya and his other classmates had asked but were left unanswered.

So here he is, yawning, bottle in one hand, can in the other, walking out to the track and the bench nearby. He blearily sees Bakugou running his laps. He sits down on the bench and pops open his can.

Instead of trotting right over to him, which Bakugou usually does, he keeps running his circle all the way around until he's in front of Hitoshi. Then he slows and stops and stands there, breathing deeply, sweaty already, staring at Hitoshi.

Hitoshi held out the bottle to Bakugou as he took a sip from his own drink. He was definitely going to need another one of these.

Bakugou walked over, plucked the bottle from his hand and said without preamble, "You look like shit."

"I barely slept last night," Hitoshi retorted.

Bakugou grunted.

"Which is how my whole week has been going, actually," Hitoshi continued, "Which is why I wasn't here early to watch you. Not that I regularly show up like I've got some sort of Bakugou watching schedule."

Bakugou's brows furrow together, "What the fuck are you yammering about now?"

"I'm tired, Bakugou," Hitoshi said.

"So fucking take a nap," he said as if it were the most obvious thing and Hitoshi was a flat out idiot.

Hitoshi glared at him, "It's freezing out here."

"Go inside," Bakugou said, "Fucking hell, do you need me to do all your thinking for you?"

"I haven't had my coffee yet," Hitoshi grumbled, hunching his shoulders in and taking another drink. "Fuck off."

"You're the one who walked out here," Bakugou replied, "Walk back

in and take a nap somewhere. The library should be open and it has those cushioned chairs."

"It's been my experience," Hitoshi said while staring down at the can in his hands, "That it's better for me not to sleep in public. I'm not *exactly* everyone's favorite person." Though his classmates have warmed up to him some, it's definitely the first time that's happened. He's much more used to people being absolutely certain he was going to brainwash them at every opportunity.

Bakugou gave another grunt.

Hitoshi drank more coffee.

He jolted when Bakugou suddenly sat down next to him. Looking up in surprise, he found Bakugou glaring at him as if it was his fault that he'd had to stop his morning run.

What are you doing now? Hitoshi desperately wanted to know what was going through Bakugou's head but, honestly, he couldn't begin to fathom it right now. He really did just want to go back to sleep.

"The locker room is safe enough," Bakugou said after a few seconds of silence. "There are benches and towels for pillows and I can wake you up when I'm done out here." He jerked his finger towards a side entrance to the school, where one could enter to get into the gym and the locker rooms beyond. "I'm usually done before anyone else gets here."

Hitoshi stared at him for a few more seconds, barely restraining himself from asking if Bakugou was serious. Of course he was fucking serious. Bakugou didn't joke. At least Hitoshi couldn't ever remember him telling a joke.

"All right," Hitoshi found himself saying. "But if you forget and leave me there-"

"I won't fucking forget," Bakugou snapped. He took another deep drink from his bottle and then shoved it into Hitoshi's hands as he got back to his feet. "Keep hold of this for me until then."

Then without waiting for Hitoshi to reply, he began his run again.

Hitoshi watched him make half a lap before he managed to get his brain in gear and get to his own feet. He didn't stumble back to the school but that was only because he walked in a sort of fugue state.

Bakugou, he realized slowly, was being *nice* to him. To *him.* The kid that no one was nice to. The kid that no one talked to. The kid that was nobody's friend. Bakugou was being fucking nice to him.

Hitoshi was too bewildered by the situation to even get mad at the asshole for it. Bakugou had access to everything Hitoshi had ever wanted and he turned around and chose Hitoshi to be nice to? What the *fuck.*

He managed to get into the locker room, which indeed was warm, and find a comfortable spot. There were some chairs near one side and he did find a towel to use as a pillow. It was clean, of course. Then he just finished his drink, got comfortable and closed his eyes.

After what felt like a minute but must have been longer, Hitoshi was jostled awake by a hand on his shoulder. He jerked to consciousness abruptly and stared up into red eyes. For one moment his sleep brain was in full control of his whole self and he mumbled out the word, "Pretty."

Bakugou's eyes widened and Hitoshi felt his whole face heat up. His sleep brain abandoned him to his horrified awake brain and Hitoshi stammered out a half dozen nonsense words before he just went silent. Bakugou went from wide-eyed with surprise to an expression twisted up with annoyance and he pulled back.

"Uh," Hitoshi managed, "You're done with your run?"

Bakugou rolled those pretty eyes - *fuck, what are you thinking Hitoshi-* and scoffed, "No," he said, "I'm just in here because I got fucking bored." He jerked his thumb towards the door, "Come on, fuckwad, let's go before the third years show up."

"Right," Hitoshi said. It was then that he noticed Bakugou had already changed back into his uniform. It was still a sloppy mess but he was always like that and, honestly, Hitoshi could not give two fucks about how Bakugou wore his uniform. Did he think it was disrespectful? Yeah. Did he think that Bakugou was doing it on purpose? Also yes.

Instead of saying anything about that, he gathered up his stuff and put aside the towel. He rubbed his cheek with one hand, hoping that the fabric didn't leave an impression, and held up the half-empty water

bottle to Bakugou. “Here.”

“Thanks,” Bakugou said when he took it. He led the way out of the locker room, Hitoshi on his heels.

It was just in time, too, because some third years *were* heading down the hall to the locker room as they left. Bakugou didn’t pay them any attention, though they gave him a curious glance. They gave Hitoshi an even more curious glance, but Hitoshi followed Bakugou’s lead and ignored them.

He wasn’t entirely sure where Bakugou was headed or why he was following him, but after a minute of trailing behind, he decided to step up and walk at his side. Whatever this thing was that was going on between them- Hitoshi didn’t want it to be one-sided. He wasn’t a follower type and he wasn’t about to let Bakugou become his leader.

Bakugou didn’t seem to notice other than glance at him and readjust the strap of his bag on his shoulder. He continued to say nothing as they walked side by side.

To the library, it turned out. Bakugou opened the door for both of them and then headed off, presumably to wherever his preferred spot was. Hitoshi debated just wandering off on his own, but when he lingered too long by the door, Bakugou gave a surreptitious glance over his shoulder.

Oh what the hell, Hitoshi thought to himself, *might as well round out the whole morning with weird shit.*

So he went after Bakugou and joined him at the table Bakugou chose. It was near an east-facing window so the light streamed in through the blinds across the table. Bakugou sat and pulled out some books and paperwork from his bag. Hitoshi sat opposite him and did the same.

He’d finished most of his homework the night before so really he only had to check it over and make sure he had everything. After a few minutes, Hitoshi put his school stuff away and pulled out the latest book he was reading. Chin propped in his hand, he enjoyed the quiet morning, the growing warmth of the sunlight, his decent novel, and Bakugou’s silent company.

He was still tired but his grouchiness had worn away.

If this is what it was like to be Bakugou’s friend- and he still was sure they *weren’t* friends, probably just acquaintances or something- then

maybe. Well, maybe it was kind of nice.

He could maybe get used to this.

habit leads to familiarity

If anyone were to ask Shinsou when it changed; when their friendship became something more, he would've begrudgingly said it was his fault. They had established a simple routine separate from the rest of their lives in those quiet mornings together. Their friendship had settled down from its strange beginning. Nothing would've changed if he hadn't said anything.

If anyone were to ask Bakugou when it changed; when platonic became romantic, he would've said it was his fault. Things had been fine. They had a routine. They met, they talked, they studied together. Sometimes they ran into each other outside of school. It was never more serious than a school-based friendship. That was fine. It was all fine.

And then between one week and the next, things happened and Bakugou changed.

Katsuki is tugging on his uniform jacket in the locker room when Shinsou makes that sound in the back of his throat which means he was thinking about saying something but decided against it. He used to do it a lot more than he does now, Katsuki's noticed. He knows Shinsou has hangups about his quirk because it's a call-and-response type that is pretty aggressive, in its own way, but he figured they'd mostly gotten past the part where Shinsou struggles against himself to speak up.

So he picks up his bag, slings it over a shoulder and slams his locker shut before scowling at Shinsou.

He's sitting in that chair he prefers, the one near the wall where he can stretch out and sometimes fall asleep if he doesn't want to wait outside for Katsuki in the morning. He stretches a little as he gets up to his feet, still not saying anything as he picks up his own bag.

Katsuki lets the silence continue until they get to the hallway before he shoves Shinsou's shoulder with his own and makes him stumble a few steps.

Shinsou glares at him, "What?"

"What do you mean what," Katsuki said back.

"You're the one who shoved me," Shinsou snapped back.

"What were you going to say earlier?" Katsuki asked. He normally wouldn't ask but he's done the 'you know why' 'no I don't' 'yes you do' routine with Shinsou before and that's just tedious.

"I wasn't going to say anything," Shinsou said with a frown, but his eyes fell away from Katsuki and his fingers tightened on his bag so Katsuki knew he was lying.

"Sure you weren't," Katsuki said with a shrug, "You just had that constipated look on your face because you were shitting yourself."

Shinsou snorted, "I did not."

"Didn't what?" Katsuki asked quickly, a smirk cutting across his features, "Look constipated or shit yourself?"

"Either of those things," Shinsou said. "What is with you this morning?"

"You're the one biting your tongue," Katsuki said. He lifted one hand and gestured between himself and Shinsou, "I thought we were done with your whole weird not-talking thing because people think you're a brainfucking asshole with no morals."

"It's nothing," Shinsou said. It was all he said too, which Katsuki didn't like. Usually, when he pressed on Shinsou about people thinking he was an asshole, he turned it around on Katsuki. They were in the same boat there, mistaken for proto-villains because of some fucked up reason or another.

Katsuki had known Shinsou for pretty much the entire term and the only time he'd ever seen him use his quirk was during the Sports Festival- where it was not only allowed but kind of the entire fucking point.

So he scowls at Shinsou because now he's being sulky and Katsuki

fucking hates it when Shinsou gets sulky. They keep walking for a while, almost to the library now, and the silence pulls up around them again. Fucking annoying is what that is.

“Fine,” Katsuki said as they reached the library doors, “Whatever.”

Shinsou frowns at him still, so it looks like he’s just gonna be like that all morning now but whatever. He goes to their regular table and pulls out his classwork. The end of term testing starts tomorrow and he’s not messing around on these exams. He’s going to ace the written test and the practicals or he’s going to die trying.

He’ll just have to deal with Shinsou’s sulking later.

It’s lunch time and if Katsuki doesn’t get the fuck away from his classmates he will probably *actually* blow one of them up. He swipes up his lunch and is out of the room before Kirishima or someone can stall him with chatter or invitations to eat with him, to which they can promptly go fuck themselves, and heads down the hallway.

At first he thinks he’d like to just go somewhere quiet and eat and rage a bit on his own but as he’s flipping between a few locations in his head, his damn feet head down the halls to the Generals. Before he knows it, he’s in familiar territory.

He slows down, reconsidering before he makes it to the classroom just a few doors down the hall from him now. He could just keep walking and not stop in. He wasn’t super likely to be noticed if he did that. Or he could just pop in and fuck with Shinsou a bit before leaving again, which honestly sounded like fun.

But then he remembered that Shinsou was being a sulky bastard that morning and he never did find out why so instead of a fly-by bothering, Katsuki gets an idea in his head. He’s been irritated and pestered with all fucking morning. He had to get rid of that energy at least a little bit.

What better way than to prod his sulky friend out of their slump, hm?

The door to the classroom is propped open a little bit; they’re clearly at lunch themselves and though usually someone leaves it open all the

way, it's only a couple of inches today. Katsuki pauses outside of it long enough to double-check that they really are at lunch and not being held by the teacher or some shit. He hears chatter and desks moving so he moves in.

Sliding open the door the rest of the way, Katsuki walks into the General classroom and over to Shinsou's desk, which is in the middle, as usual.

Shinsou has just pulled out his lunch and a book to read during it, because he's a social loser that is honestly worse than Deku sometimes with his behavior. He stops when he catches sight of Katsuki and he blinks in surprise. The sulk is mostly gone already, which is fine, even if Katsuki did come here to mess with him because of it.

Katsuki puts his bento on Shinsou's desk and looks around. The desk to Shinsou's right is empty so he drags it and the associated chair over, turning it to be perpendicular to Shinsou. He's already sat down with his food in front of him before Shinsou manages to say anything.

"Bakugou, what the fuck."

"Hair-for-brains and the other shitheads are getting on my last fucking nerve, Shinsou," Katsuki retorts as he pops open his bento.

Shinsou blinked, "And you came here to what, eat lunch and gossip about them?"

Katsuki rolled his eyes, he wasn't a fucking gossip and Shinsou knew that. "I'm just here to eat."

Out of the corner of his eye, he could see that nosy classmate that Shinsou would bitch about come creeping up. She had a devious look in her eyes, hands clasped in front of herself.

Katsuki turned and glared at her, "You better keep your fucking distance today, you nosy bitch. I'm *this* fucking close to blowing up a classroom of fuckheads and I don't much care which class gets its ass kicked, yours or mine."

Usually, this kind of threat has the effect of turning away other students, especially when his hands smoke a little bit like they are right now, but this chick just leans closer without actually taking a step closer and said, "Are you and Shinsou eating lunch together, Bakugou?"

“Tanya,” Shinsou said while he pinched the bridge of his nose, “I already have to deal with this asshole. I don’t need double duty today.”

Her shining look became pinched and her hands went to her hips, “I’m not an asshole, Shinsou!”

“Takes one to know one,” Katsuki said, “And you’re Grade-A, so fuck off all right?”

She puffed up a little and Katsuki thought she might actually keep going but a friend of hers came over and whispered to her. She deflated and made a big show of rolling her eyes and saying “What. Ever.” before turning around and leaving them be.

Katsuki promptly ignored her and the rest of Shinsou’s classmates as he ate. He put his foot up under his desk, resting the heel of it on the crossbar on Shinsou’s desk. Shinsou gave him a look but it wasn’t an annoyed one. They ate in silence for a while, because silence was what Shinsou was good at and silence was what Katsuki kind of needed right then.

As he finished off his food, Katsuki said, “Hey, want to get drinks before the hour’s up?”

Shinsou shrugged, “Sure.”

A minute or two later, they were heading out of the classroom together, Katsuki with his empty bento beneath one arm and Shinsou with his hands in his pockets. The hallways were populated with clusters of students, some wandering, some eating in the hallway, some just standing around and talking, but as they got farther out towards the training yard, it became more kids out of uniform and in gym clothes, headed one way or another than not.

The vending machine that Katsuki considered ‘theirs’ was the second most out of the way vending machine on the whole campus. It carried mostly sports drinks, of which he’s tried most of them, purely because Shinsou doesn’t always buy the same thing every time, and also that weird brand and flavor of coffee Shinsou preferred. Katsuki’s not a coffee drinker, not since he had his mother’s in middle school and nearly passed out from heart palpitations, but that means he’s also no judge of brands or flavors. They’re all weird to him.

They have to wait for a handful of other students to order and leave, heading back outside into the sunlight, before they can order for

themselves.

Drinks in hand, they go a little farther down the hall where it dead-ends into a door to the outside or to stairs up. Leaning against the wall, Katsuki's half-turned toward Shinsou, who pops the tab on his coffee and sips it.

After another minute, Shinsou makes that weird 'nevermind-I-won't-say-that' noise again and frowns at his can.

Rolling his eyes, Katsuki looks up at the ceiling, "You could just fucking say whatever it is that you're thinking you know. I already think you're a fucking asshole, but you're not an idiotic one so unless whatever you're holding back is *really* fucking dumb, spit it out already."

Another heartbeat and then quietly, "My parents want me to invite you over for dinner. So they can meet you."

Katsuki blinks. Slowly, he lowers his gaze and stares at Shinsou.

Shinsou is staring down at the can in his hand.

"What?"

"Like, this weekend or something," Shinsou said, "Since it'll be the end of term and we'll have more free time."

"Why?"

The tips of Shinsou's ears turn a little pink as he mutters, "They want to meet this friend of mine that I go early to see every day." Finally he looks up, glaring at Katsuki, "I didn't used to be early all the time, you know. Just when I woke early and couldn't get back to sleep. But then you started harassing me when you didn't see me in the morning so I just…" he stopped abruptly and shrugged.

"Not that it apparently matters if we meet in the morning," he said, turning his head away, "Because you just come bug me at lunch anyway now."

"You were sulking," Katsuki said automatically, the rest of his mind chewing through Shinsou's words and expression. "You're shit company when you sulk."

"What, so it didn't count this morning when we hung out because you

think I was sulking?"

"I didn't think you were, you *actually* were. You were pouting and fucking everything," Katsuki snapped. Then he asked, "Does it really bother you to have me visit at lunch?"

Whatever he's about to say, Shinsou instead closes his mouth and presses his lips into a thin line. Katsuki's grip on his bottle tightens but he politely restrains himself. Exploding on Shinsou gets him nothing but sarcasm and snippy replies and that's not productive.

"The others get on my fucking case about it when you do," Shinsou said. "It's annoying."

"So we meet outside of your classroom then," Katsuki said.

"You want to meet up for lunch now too?"

Katsuki shrugged. That hadn't exactly been what he meant; they didn't really do lunch except when he occasionally came to fuck with Shinsou but-

"I don't know, doesn't that seem a little…" Shinsou's voice trailed off.

They stood there for a bit, neither one saying anything, until Katsuki muttered, "What time do your parents want me over?"

Shinsou turned to face him, "You'll actually come over?"

Katsuki shrugged again.

"How about next Sunday? Like, six or something?"

"Sure," Katsuki said. "Is your big sister going to be there?"

"Probably not," Shinsou said. "But my two younger siblings will be."

Katsuki nodded. With a smirk, he asked, "So how much of a loser do your parents think you are if they make such a big deal of you having a friend they gotta meet him?"

Shinsou glared at him, "Just be glad they don't think you're my boyfriend or something. Though, honestly, it's hard to tell just what they think," he turned back to lean against the wall, scowling ahead at nothing.

Katsuki mulled that over a little bit. "Why would they think I'm your

boyfriend?" he asked, "That doesn't make any fucking sense." Parents were so fucking weird.

It's a few seconds before he realizes that Shinsou went like, stone-cold stiff next to him. His scowl has vanished and he's got that expression like he can't believe he forgot to do some homework assignment and he's got to scramble to do damage control.

"What?" Katsuki asked, nudging Shinsou's shoulder with his own, "Shinsou?"

"I just. Realized something," he said faintly. He clears his throat and nervously licks his lips.

"What is it?" Katsuki said, "You look like that time you forgot about your history essay and you had to wing it in like, thirty minutes."

Shinsou closed his eyes. He seemed to be psyching himself up for something which made Katsuki wary. Usually people who had to psyche themselves up were about to do something dumb, brave or scary. Shinsou, though annoying, wasn't dumb and, though in General studies, wasn't a coward. So what the fuck was he scared of?

"Please don't freak out," Shinsou said quietly, eyes still closed.

"About what?" Katsuki asked. He didn't say he was already kind of freaking out.

Taking in a deep breath, Shinsou let it out as a heavy sigh. Then he turned to face Katsuki again, eyes opening as he said, "I'm gay."

Katsuki blinked at him.

"That's why they could assume that we were dating or something, because I'm gay." He put up one hand, "Not that I'm saying that we are or that they even do think that because they would've asked me that already if they thought so. But that's why. Because-"

"You're gay."

Shinsou winced but nodded.

Katsuki frowned, "That means you, what, like other guys or something?"

"Uh. Yeah?"

Katsuki considered this. He tilted his head to the side, staring at Shinsou. He'd never seen him really interact with people outside of the Sports Festival, that annoying chick in his class and sometimes people in the hall or library. Shinsou was a weird, social outcast in a way that none of the people Katsuki had associated himself with before ever were.

Okay, maybe Deku was a weird social outcast too, but Katsuki had stopped 'associating' with him a long time ago.

"Huh."

Shinsou blinked at him for a second and then repeated back, *"Huh?* What- what's that supposed to mean?"

"I don't know if I've ever met anyone else who was gay before," Katsuki said.

"Uh," Shinsou seemed at a loss for words, but rallied after a second or two, "Is it going to be a problem?"

"No?" Katsuki said, "Is it supposed to be?"

"Sometimes it can be," Shinsou admitted, looking away again. "Sometimes…" he hesitated and then sighed, "Sometimes the gay thing freak people out more than the brainwashing thing. Sometimes the gay thing makes them hate the brainwashing thing even more."

"Like you'd use it on someone for gay stuff?" Katsuki asked.

Wordlessly, Shinsou shrugged and nodded.

"You wouldn't do that though."

Shinsou's head jerked up and he stared at Katsuki, eyes wide. As if he were somehow surprised that Katsuki knew he wouldn't do something so evil.

"That's villain shit," Katsuki said, leaning over to poke Shinsou in the chest, "And you don't do villain shit. Well sometimes you're a fucking sneaky bastard but that's just your personality. I don't hold it against you."

Katsuki hoped it was relief or something that made Shinsou's hands shake as he ran it over his face. It bothered him that Shinsou was so freaked out about telling him this. Did other people really fuck around

on this? Who gave a shit?

“Have you done gay stuff before?” Katsuki asked.

Shinsou’s cheeks flushed, “No. Not really.”

“Okay,” Katsuki said.

“Why?” Shinsou asked, “Have you done not-gay stuff before?”

Katsuki considered this. Something tugged on his memories from middle school. He sipped his drink for a bit and then said, “I might’ve had a girlfriend I think? For like. Three days before she gave it up.”

“What do you mean ‘might have had’?”

Shrugging, Katsuki said, “I got like one of those notes in my locker that someone liked me and to meet them at the back fence. It was some girl from another class. She said she liked me and wanted to be my girlfriend and she had a pretty strong quirk so figured she could hang around.” Then he frowned, remembering more of that weird week with her, “But she wanted me to like, wait for her all the time and walk her home from school and carry her shit and eat lunch with her and her dumb friends. I told her to go fuck herself and she said we were done and never spoke to me again. Girls are fucking weird.”

“Did you,” Shinsou seemed to be carefully picking his words as he said slowly, “Did you even like her?”

“I don’t even remember her name,” Katsuki said, “I think she had… brown hair?”

“Do you even like girls?”

Against his best efforts, Katsuki thought of Mineta and his weird pervert behavior. He seemed to think that the girls in their class were really attractive, even the invisible bitch, but Katsuki couldn’t see what he was talking about. They had strong quirks and some of them had tolerable personalities and a few of them were clearly capable of some cool shit, but did he like them just because they were *girls?*

Katsuki shrugged.

“Do you like boys?” Shinsou asked hesitantly.

“Hair-for-brains isn’t a total fuckwit,” Katsuki said. And one day he *would* make Todoroki fight him for real. “And you’re… not bad I

guess."

He wasn't even going to bring up or think about Deku. That was a whole different thing there.

"I know we're friends," Shinsou said a little exasperatedly, "But I mean like, romantically. Does anyone interest you at all?"

"No?" Katsuki said, "Should they?"

"How about this," Shinsou said, "Can you picture yourself in like, a long term relationship with someone? Someone you'd like to have around every day, maybe live with them? Like… hug them and hold hands and kiss? Stuff like that?"

Katsuki stared down the hallway as he considered this. "What," he asked with a frown, "Like being married? Like my parents?"

"Yeah," Shinsou said, "What kind of person do you imagine marrying?"

"Someone with a strong quirk," Katsuki said immediately. If he was going to have kids, they were going to have good, strong quirks.

Shinsou didn't say anything to that, just let him think about it some more. Katsuki scratched at the back of his neck. What kind of person would he want to live with? What kind of question was *that?*

And why was it so hard to think of someone?

The lunch warning bell rang above them, jolting Katsuki from his thoughts. He swore and pushed off the wall.

Shinsou followed suit, walking with him back down the hallway.

As they walked, Katsuki admitted, "I don't know what kind of person I'd live with. It just doesn't seem important right now."

"That's fair," Shinsou said.

"What about you? What kind of person would you live with?" Katsuki asked.

Shinsou smiled a little, "A smart, good looking guy. He's gotta have a decent job and isn't a shithole to my family or me, obviously. We gotta be able to talk to each other but also be able to enjoy each other's company in silence. And he has to like cats."

That was a pretty solid list. Katsuki could probably come up with a list like that if he thought about it. He'd have to consider it some more, though it helped to know what kinds of things people looked for in other people. He was worried it would be weird shit like "must be a poet" or "can't be sentimental" or super specific like hair color and eye color.

Before parting ways, Katsuki thumped Shinsou's shoulder with his fist, "Next Sunday at six, right? Text me the address?"

"Yeah," Shinsou said with a faint smile, "I'll do that."

Katsuki went left while Shinsou went right. As he headed back to class he considered the task left to him from their conversation. However, as he stepped back through the door and into the noisy class, he let it slip from his mind.

Later, he'd worry about it later.

Besides his teachers and the heroes from his week of field training, the only official Hero that Katsuki knows is Nakushi. She's also the only one Katsuki feels at all inclined to talk to outside of school. Best Jeanist may, in fact, be the number four hero, but if Katsuki had known what that week working with him was going to be like he almost certainly would've picked somewhere else to go.

He still has Nakushi's number from weeks ago when she foisted it on him while they waited for Shinsou to finish his noodles, but he doesn't talk to her much. She'll send him pictures of birds and shit, which, whatever, that's just her thing, but generally he doesn't talk to her.

When the rest of his class decides to meet up and go shopping together for the shit they need for camp, Katsuki decides he should probably head to the shops too. But instead of going with his annoying classmates, he takes a gamble that Nakushi would be free.

After all, not only was she a hero before but she'd also gone to Yuuei. If anyone had any pointers on what this boot camp was going to be like, and what, if any, unofficial supplies he should get were, it was going to be her.

A few text messages back and forth and their outing goes from the pair of them to some friend of hers and Shinsou as well. Katsuki isn't super thrilled about shopping with a random person, but four sounds much more workable than the dozen and a half or so group of classmates he could've ended up saddled with.

The meetup location is some cafe nearest to the shops and Katsuki buys himself a drink while he waits. Nakushi is hard to spot in the crowd of shoppers on the sidewalk, but Shinsou is tall enough that Katsuki sees him easily enough. Just before they reach the doors to the cafe, Nakushi starts waving at someone and breaks away from Shinsou to greet this other person.

Katsuki stuffs his free hand into his pocket and shoulders his way through the doors as he heads out to meet them. Nakushi is fluttering in front of the stranger, delightedly chattering at him so Katsuki figures this must be the guy Shinji she told him would join them. The guy's got a wispy kind of silver-colored mohawk that rides between two pairs of horns and down his neck. He's tall but weirdly stocky like his arms and legs are abnormally short for how tall he was. There's a blue-green metallic sheen to his skin that, as Katsuki gets closer, he realizes is lizard scales. These, coupled with a thick tail coiled around the back of the guy's feet remind Katsuki of drawings of old dragons he's seen, long-bodied with short limbs and horns.

Nakushi spots him and waves, "Katsuki-kun!" She's wearing that feathery shawl thing that she had on the last time but this time her lavender-colored hair has been let loose around her shoulders instead of pinned back. She bounces over to Katsuki and throws her arms around his shoulders in a hug.

Katsuki rolls his eyes and pats her on the back, "Hi," he said.

"Hi? That's it for your senpai?" she pulled back from the hug with a grin and a glint in her eye. "C'mon, Katsuki-kun! That's not cute at all!"

"You already graduated," he said, "You're not really my senpai."

She gave a bit of a pout but didn't push the issue, "Fine, fine, whatever you say. Anyway, Shinji, this is Katsuki-kun. He's Hitoshi's friend from school."

"Hello, Katsuki-kun," Shinji said. He had large yellow-colored eyes with slitted pupils. It was pretty interesting for a body modifying quirk. Katsuki knew that ancient dragons were supposed to be able to

fly and he wondered if Shinji was capable of that.

“Hey Bakugou,” Shinsou said quietly as he went around his sister to stand beside Katsuki.

“Sup, Shinsou,” Katsuki replied.

“We should get drinks from the cafe before we go shopping,” Nakushi said, “What do you guys think?”

Katsuki slurped noisily on his tea. It was still pretty full. Nakushi huffed at him and gestured to herself, “Well I want to get a drink before we start shopping.”

“That sounds good to me,” Shinji said, “This place reportedly has excellent bubble tea.” He glanced at Katsuki's cup, “How is yours?”

“Not bad,” Katsuki said.

“Hitoshi, do you want something too?” Nakushi asked, “My treat!”

Hitoshi shrugged, “As long as it’s coffee-flavored, I don’t care.”

“Okay! We’ll be right back then,” she looped her arm through Shinji’s and trotted off into the cafe. She was already talking about something else before they’d even gone three feet.

Katsuki sighed.

“Regretting this already?” Shinsou asked with an arched eyebrow.

“It’ll be worth it if she actually gives me good advice,” Katsuki said, “But at least I don’t have to be the only one here for her to talk to. I would fucking lose it.”

Shinsou snorted, “Yeah, her inviting Shinji really saved you there.”

“The other option was definitely worse,” Katsuki muttered.

“Don’t tell me, your classmates were planning on a trip out?”

Katsuki nodded and took another sip from his tea. Shinsou gave that soft laugh of his, lifting his hand to half cover his mouth.

“You’re kidding me, right? Did the entire class go out together?”

“As far as I can tell, yeah,” Katsuki said.

“Wow,” Shinsou said, “They’re like, all attached at the hip or something.” He turned a little so he could see the cafe behind where they stood. Katsuki glanced over but with all the displays out and the people inside, he couldn’t see Nakushi inside. He saw a shape that might’ve been Shinji but it was hard to tell.

“Or something,” Katsuki said. Privately, he thought none of them had any idea what they were supposed to be doing at Yuuei. It wasn’t a place to befriend everyone and socialize for fun. Eventually they’d all be in the field at the same time, competing for the top rankings and best agencies. Maybe befriending one or two others, the ones that were really strong and really capable and connected would be worth it, but the entire fucking class? Come on. It was just exhausting to think about and Katsuki was always running on full cylinders here.

“Hey, this might be… a weird question,” Shinsou said. He had his hand rubbing at the back of his neck, “But do you actually like *any* of your classmates? Like. Are any of them what you would call a friend?”

“You’re right, that’s a weird fucking question,” Katsuki said, “Why the fuck do you want to know that?”

“I just-” he grimaced and heaved a sigh, “You just talk shit about them a lot. Not like, all the time, but whenever they come up in conversation you just say how dumb they are. I know that one guy with the hair is pretty friendly with you still and I don’t know what the deal is with Midoriya but he clearly thinks highly of you-”

Katsuki snorted when Shinsou brought up Deku. He did *not* like talking about Deku with Shinsou. Mostly because Shinsou seemed to think Deku was somehow respectable and interesting and not a total fuckwit. It was one of the very few topics that they both silently agreed not to talk about.

“Right,” Shinsou said as he dropped his hand, “You talk shit about them so I guess I was just wondering if any of them are your friends and that’s just, something you do when they’re not around.”

It was not just a weird question, it was a sideways one. There was something off about the way Shinsou asked it, as if it wasn’t just the clunky way he presented it that made it off. Katsuki considered his reply as he slurped his tea. Shinsou was watching him now that he’d asked his questions, clearly hoping for some sort of reply.

“I talk shit about them to their faces too,” Katsuki said first, to clear up any misunderstanding there. He was not the kind to sugarcoat

things, especially for his idiotic classmates. “If I see shit, I say shit, you know that.”

“Yeah,” Shinsou nodded.

“So why do you care if I talk shit about them? I do it with everyone.”

“Even me?” Shinsou asked.

“What?” Katsuki squinted at him, what was he getting at?

“Do you talk shit about me when I’m not around?”

Katsuki blinked in surprise. “I don’t talk about you at all when you’re not around,” he said honestly.

This seemed to surprise Shinsou too, “You don’t?”

“Why the hell would I?” Katsuki asked, “It’s not their business and I don’t fucking care what their opinions about you would be in any case.” He poked Shinsou in the chest as he said, “At least half of them don’t remember you because they’ve got sponge brains. The rest of them probably don’t fucking like you or don’t think highly of you because of various fucking reasons that also don’t matter to me. If I brought up that we hang out, which I wouldn’t because it’s *not their fucking business,* and they threw a fit you know what I would tell them, Shinsou.”

Shinsou gave him an exasperated look, “You can’t solve every argument by shouting ‘fuck you’ until the other person gives up, Bakugou.”

“Fuck you, yes I can,” Katsuki said, mostly to be a cheeky shit, “But the fucking fact is I don’t give enough of a shit about their opinions to let whatever bullshit they say change how I feel about you. I don’t fucking like them, Shinsou. And I don’t fucking respect them, either. They’re mostly idiots and don’t take studying or practice serious enough without fucking *logical ruses* being used against them by our fucking teacher.”

“What are you two talking about?” Nakushi said, abruptly interrupting their conversation with her arrival. She held out a cup to Shinsou, who took it and sipped at it with a murmured thanks.

“Your brother is fucking insecure as hell,” Katsuki announced to Nakushi, “Can we go shopping now? I have other shit to do today.”

She blinked, looked to Shinsou for an explanation but he just gave her a weird little smile and shrugged. “Oh-kayyy,” she drew out the word for a few seconds, “I guess we’re ready to go then! Come on, first thing you’re going to want is something to take care of all the bugs and since you can’t just ask the local wildlife to help out, that means we’ll have to get some man-made traps and-” She continued her rambling, though this time it was actually kind of useful, as she turned and headed into the shops.

Shinji walked on her left, Katsuki quickly went to walk on her right and Shinsou went to the right of him. He gave Shinsou a quick glance, to see if his friend was going to sulk over what Katsuki told him -some people *liked* to be talked about, which was annoying as hell, honestly. Shinsou, however, had a pretty calm expression on and, in fact, gave Katsuki a bit of a smile when he looked over.

Whatever he got from Katsuki’s answer he liked which was enough for Katsuki. He gave a brief smile back before turning his attention back to Nakushi and her advice.

The camping trip did not end well.

Katsuki’s arms are painfully raw where the bindings that the villains tied him up had worn away the surface of his skin. He’s only just gotten home from the police headquarters, through the gauntlet of care and worry that his parents ran him through, into and out of a shower and onto his bed and it still hasn’t really sunk in. Not yet.

His heart’s been pounding in a way that it hasn’t since they were attacked at USJ, but that had been less bad than this. He hadn’t gotten kidnapped that time. He hadn’t been basically called a proto-villain on live television.

Aizawa did say he wasn’t the kind of kid to become a villain, but the reporter had still asked. The *villains* had still assumed that he would be willing to turn over to their side. They all looked at him and judged him and said he’d be a villain when all he’d ever wanted, *all he’d ever said he wanted to be,* was a hero.

Someone took all his stuff from the camp and brought it home to his mother. He’d tripped over the bag on his way into the room, half-full

of supplies but missing his phone and his clothes. The clothes he assumes his mother took to wash. The phone he finds on the charger by his bed.

There are a few messages from kids he knew in middle school that show they found out about what happened - not that anyone shouldn't know, considering it was broadcasted on the TV- but he scrolls through them without really reading them. He hasn't talked to most of those guys since he'd started high school. He doesn't really want to talk to them.

There is one contact he does want to hear from. He looks for and finds a message from Shinsou. Just the one and it's short.

Shinsou: when you get back, i want to meet up. Tower square, by the boba place, 10am.

The message was sent during the time where Katsuki was in police custody after he escaped from the villains. It's a typical Shinsou message, no extraneous information, a question phrased as a demand, and somewhere near a park and a cafe.

Katsuki wouldn't have cared if the request to meet up was halfway up a mountain or a downtown subway. He texts back an affirmative [*tomorrow. 10am]* and then puts his phone down on his bedside table.

He lays there, staring at his ceiling, until his eyes finally shut and he falls asleep, hair still slightly damp from his shower and the light to his room still on.

Katsuki sat on a bench across the street from the boba place at the edge of the park, waiting. He's watching the avenue not just for Shinsou but for any sign of trouble, too. He hates how jumpy he feels about being watched, about being targeted, but he doesn't know if there's anything he could even do about it.

The cops seemed pretty convinced the villains wouldn't take him a second time because they'd captured their true leader and the weird guy with the hands hadn't been able to convince Katsuki to change on his own. They were more worried that Katsuki was simply a target to attack now and had advised him to lay low for a while.

Normally, Katsuki would've done that, but he felt like an asshole to make Shinsou come all the way out to his house and didn't want his mother to butt in on his friendship. She had opinions on 'real quirks' and didn't much like the mental manipulation ones for some reason. Katsuki didn't care what she thought about it but didn't want Shinsou to get yelled at by his mom.

He spots Shinsou down the street and, as he gets closer, Katsuki gets to his feet. His heart catches in his chest when he sees the expression Shinsou wears. Instead of his usual calm demeanor, there's this look of relief on his face that makes Katsuki's skin warm.

Shinsou speeds up from his walk to a jog as he clears the crowd and then, abruptly, he's there in front of Katsuki, hands out, reaching for him. Katsuki's breath stutters as Shinsou hugs him. He's not much taller than Katsuki, only an inch or two, but he pulls him tightly into the hug and it lifts Katsuki's heels up off the ground. Katsuki's too surprised to move for at first, but the hug isn't brief and so he has time to bring his hands up and rest them on the middle of Shinsou's back.

Neither of them say anything during the embrace. Katsuki closes his eyes and focuses on the feeling of Shinsou's fingers digging into one shoulder and under a shoulder blade. He focuses on the warmth of Shinsou's body holding him and how solid he is under Katsuki's own palms. He can feel Shinsou's hair against his cheek and ear and hear his soft, rasping breath.

Slowly, Shinsou pulls back from the hug. His hands slide to Katsuki's shoulders as he puts a little space between them and he looks over his face. The concern there is so obvious that Katsuki finds himself muttering, "I'm okay. Really, I'm okay," to Shinsou before he's really thinking about it.

"Did they hurt you?" Shinsou asked.

"Not really," Katsuki said.

"Did they all get caught?"

"Most of them," Katsuki said, "I think."

"Are you safe now? Are they going to come after you again?"

Katsuki shrugged, which was an odd experience since Shinsou still held onto his shoulders. Katsuki's hands had slid to Shinsou's waist

since he wasn't sure where else to put them, but Shinsou didn't seem to notice or care.

"Are you really okay?"

"Yeah numbnuts," Katsuki scoffed, "They were fucking idiots about all of it. They thought I was gonna join them so they fucking untied me like real chumps. I attacked them before anyone even busted in to save me." He gave Shinsou a cocky grin.

But Shinsou looked even more worried about that. "You fought the villains on your own? Why would you risk yourself like that?"

"I got the drop on the hands guy," Katsuki said, "And it turned out fine. They didn't even try to hurt me or anything."

Shinsou closed his eyes, his expression pinched. Eyes still closed, he asked, "Can I hug you again?"

"Whatever makes you feel better," Katsuki said blithely.

The second hug was as tight as the first, which surprised Katsuki enough that he let out a rushed breath as it happened. Katsuki tightened his own arms around Shinsou, partially in retaliation for how damn tight he hugged and partially because… well because. There didn't have to be any other reason for it than that.

"I was so fucking worried," Shinsou muttered against Katsuki's shoulder. "I was watching the whole thing on the TV and there was nothing I could do and I knew- I *knew* that once the villains figured out you would never join them they'd attack you. I thought they would kill you instead of letting you go."

Katsuki blinked through the sudden rise of emotion in his chest. He remembered something about the teacher to hands guy, the real leader of the group being contacted to try and force Katsuki to join them. He was never at risk for death. They were going to get what they wanted one way or another, despite whatever Katsuki said.

He shuddered thinking about it. If they *had* managed to force him and *had* managed to change him and had, what, released him again- If he'd turned villain against his own will-

"They weren't going to kill me," he muttered back, "And it turned out fine anyway."

“I didn’t know that,” Shinsou whispered, “I had no idea. I just thought- I thought I’d never see you alive again, Bakugou.”

Katsuki bit his tongue at the automatic response of *“Well you were wrong and I’m right here”* and kept silent instead.

He could hear Nakushi’s words in his head, *“I hope you do become Hitoshi’s friend, you know? Outside of the family, he really doesn’t have anyone.”* She had been smiling faintly, not really looking at him but at her feet as she ground her toes on the concrete. They had been waiting for Shinsou to come outside and join them and, before that moment, Katsuki hadn’t really even considered that Shinsou could be anything more than someone else to step over on his way to the top.

Slowly, Katsuki pulled back from the hug. Shinsou’s cheeks had some red from embarrassment as he drew his hands off of Katsuki and stuck them behind his back. Katsuki met his gaze and said, “Katsuki.”

Shinsou blinked in confusion, “What?”

“It’s my fucking name,” Katsuki said, “Call me Katsuki.” He leaned forward and poked Shinsou hard in the chest, “We’re friends, right? Friends who actually give a shit about each other?”

“Right,” Shinsou nodded, “Yeah. We are.”

“So call me Katsuki, okay?”

“I will,” he said, “If you call me Hitoshi.”

Katsuki nodded, “Deal.”

Hitoshi smiled.

familiarity leads to attraction

Chapter Summary

Dinner at the Shinsou's.

Chapter Notes

yeah so the pacing on this requires another chapter. oh well!

As Katsuki tugged on his shoes at the front door, his mother appeared at the end of the entryway.

“Where are you headed, Katsuki?” she asked, eyeing his outfit with a slight frown. “Dinner is in an hour.”

“I got plans at a friend’s place,” Katsuki said as he straightened up, tapping the toes of his shoes on the floor, “I told you last week before I went camping.”

She folded her arms across her chest, “I don’t remember that,” she said, “It’s the last day you’re home before you move into the dorms at Yuuei. Don’t you think you should spend it with your family?”

“I’m not gonna cancel an hour before I’m expected to be there,” Katsuki said, “I’m not that much of an asshole, Mom. And I definitely fucking told you because it’s on the kitchen calendar.”

“Even if it is,” she said, “That was before you got kidnapped! You know how unsafe it is for you out there, you should stay home as much as you can.”

“I don’t think the villains want me anymore,” he reached for his jacket next, pulling it on as he said, “And if they did, being home with you guys isn’t exactly the safest thing. There’s no fucking magic rule that says villains don’t fuck with family homes.”

“Katsuki,” she stepped forward, “Enough back talk, I said I want you to stay home.”

“No,” he said. He zipped up his jacket. “I’m leaving. I’ll text you when I get there. I’ll text you when I leave but I’m not going to not go because you say so. I get you’re scared, Mom, but I’m going to be

fine."

He saw the anger flash across her face and she drew herself up with a deep breath, "Young man, you are staying home tonight. I'll call your friend or their mother and explain if I have to but-"

Katsuki turned away from her and walked to the door.

"Katsuki!" He heard her footsteps as he flipped the lock on the front door and swung it open. She tried to grab him but he ducked and rushed through the opening. She grabbed the door instead and pulled it open farther. "Katsuki, listen to me!"

"Just fucking drop it, Mom," he shouted over his shoulder as he hurried down the front steps, "I'll see you later!"

"I will call the police if you don't come back here right now young man!"

"Bye!" he shouted, now speeding up as he reached the street.

"Katsuki!"

Katsuki didn't bother replying as he jogged away. He didn't want to sweat through his nice clothes so he kept it at a leisurely pace. He was pretty sure she wouldn't *actually* call the cops. More than likely she would send him an atrocious number of text messages and attempt to punish him by taking something from him.

Maybe it would be his phone. Maybe it would be some game. He didn't really care what, because once he was in the dorms regularly at the school, there wasn't really any way she could bother him.

Katsuki slowed down as he reached the station and got his ticket to ride. Adrenaline still made his pulse jump as he waited so he spent the time before the train arrived calming himself down with some measured breathing techniques. By the time he got on, he was calm again. The only excitement he felt was the nervous kind that made his guts jittery.

He knew Hitoshi didn't want Katsuki to think it was a huge deal to meet his family, but his reluctance to invite Katsuki and his nervousness about it said otherwise. Katsuki didn't know how many people Hitoshi had introduced to his family, but he figured that number had to be pretty low. His own parents had met some of his friends from middle school, but besides Deku, none of them personally

knew any of his current classmates.

Should he bring Hitoshi around sometime? What would his mother think? What would his father say? They'd paid enough attention to the Sports Festival to probably have seen or known about the match between Deku and Hitoshi, but would they remember what he could do? Hitoshi had a sort of dry humor that Katsuki thought his dad might appreciate, but his mother would be a toss-up.

Honestly, he could've sabotaged his future self by running off the way that he did. If she knew that Hitoshi was the one he ran off to see against her wishes, then she might hold that as a grudge for as long as she knew him. That would be pretty annoying to have to deal with.

Katsuki checked the buzzing of his phone with a roll of his eyes. Five, no now six, messages from his mother containing a rant about his disrespect and his recklessness and how no friend was worth his safety and she didn't even know this other person and where was he right now-

Katsuki just texted he was in transit and marked the rest of her shit as read. The message he was really looking for was buried beneath the others.

Hitoshi: ETA?

Hitoshi: also consensus was for curry. dont worry, will make sure there is some super spicy for you

Katsuki texted back that he was on the train and which stop he'd just passed. He was looking forward to the curry, spicy or not, and let Hitoshi know that too.

Putting his phone back away, Katsuki readjusted his grip on the pole he held onto for support and hummed absently as he stared out the window.

The rest of the trip was as uneventful as he'd expected it to be. He left

the train for a bus and ended up a few blocks from the address he'd been given. Katsuki double-checked the map on his phone before he tucked that into his pocket along with his hands and walked the final leg of his journey.

He hadn't had much of an idea of where Hitoshi lived, other than somewhere near some other shops since he'd mentioned that his father ran a bakery out of the first floor of their home. The tall shop was nestled between two other buildings with a small alleyway to one side. Katsuki stood outside for a minute, just looking up at the building and wondering at the windows above that he could see. Which one went where? Which room was Hitoshi's?

The hours on the door said the shop was only open for another fifteen minutes; it closed right at six on Sundays apparently. Hitoshi went inside, not too surprised to find it mostly empty. There was a woman who stood behind the counter, greeting him as he walked in.

"Hello! What can I get for you?"

Katsuki walked over to the counter. "I'm actually here to get upstairs?" Katsuki said only a touch uncertainly, "I'm Hitoshi's friend."

She visibly brightened, "Oh you *are?* Kotoe mentioned to keep an eye out for you! You're Katsuki, right?"

"Yeah," he nodded. He figured Kotoe must be Hitoshi's dad, considering the bakery was his, but he wasn't for sure on that.

"If you want to just come around the counter over there," she said as she pointed down at the end of the counter, "There's a hallway that splits off to some stairs up. Just go up the stairs and knock and you'll be at the Shinsou place."

"Thanks," he said.

"Good luck!" she smiled as he went past the counter, "And have a good time!"

He nodded again and headed into the back. Her directions were pretty accurate- there was a hallway with a split to one side that leads directly to some stairs. He gave a curious glance farther back, but only saw someone doing some cleaning up there.

After a turn at a landing and up some more steps, Katsuki came to a

door. He dug his phone out of his pocket and texted his mother that he was at his destination, ignoring the other messages she'd sent him in the meantime. Shoving the phone back away, he wiped his sweaty palms nervously on his pants. Then he knocked on the door.

He heard someone shout, "Got it, I've got it!" and then another voice, "No you don't I've got it!" and the sound of running feet before the locks turned and the door was pulled open.

There stood two kids at the door, a little boy and a young girl. Immediately Katsuki could tell that they were related to Hitoshi. The girl had long deep purple hair and the boy had short, spiky purple-grey. They both looked up at him in silence for exactly three seconds before the girl turned and shouted.

"Hitoshi! Your boyfriend is here!"

The little boy at her side started to giggle and ran forward to Katsuki, grabbing him by the hand, "Wanna see my geckos?" He started to pull him into the room and Katsuki, a little unsure but not about to just yank his hand back from the kid, allowed himself to be led inside.

This first room was fairly decent in size. The first section was a sitting area with a kotatsu and a television. There was a divider beyond that, through which he could see a table and chairs to dine at. The kitchen was adjoined to the dining area and it was partially obscured by a counter stretching out with some high cabinets above. There were two people in the kitchen and as one of them came hurriedly around the cabinets, wiping their hands on an apron, Katsuki recognized Hitoshi.

He was a little pink in the face, probably from the heat of whatever was cooking in the kitchen, and damn did it smell good. "Hanashi!" Hitoshi said as he reached them, "He is not my boyfriend. We're just friends."

"Suuuure you are," she said with a giggle.

The little boy was still pulling Katsuki, but once they reached Hitoshi, Katuski resisted so he wasn't totally dragged off.

Katsuki had never seen Hitoshi in an apron before and, after a moment, he realized he'd never seen him in such relaxed clothing, either. Sure, he'd seen him outside of their school uniform plenty, but this was the first time he was in something as comfortable as a sweater. He had the sleeves rolled up to keep them clean while he cooked. It was also a slightly too big sweater since the collar of it was

wide enough to slip toward Hitoshi's shoulder.

"C'mon!" said the little boy, "Come see my geckos!"

"Not right now Kokeshi," Hitoshi said to his brother, ignoring his sister's giggling taunts. He pried Kokeshi's fingers off of Katsuki's arm and gave him an apologetic look. "I'm sorry, they're just so excited."

"Hito-nii never brings friends over," Hanashi said, "So you've got to be a boyfriend!"

"We're friends," Katsuki said, "And I am a boy, so you're not wrong, but you're also not right, kid."

She pouted at Katsuki. "But why *aren't* you his-" Her voice was muffled as Hitoshi put his hand over her mouth.

"Hana," he said quietly, "Can you go help get dinner ready and set the table?"

She glared over his hand and made some sort of noise of assent. Hitoshi pulled his hand away and she turned with a roll of her eyes, skipping off to the dining area.

Katsuki looked down at a tugging on his sleeve. Kokeshi looked up at him with big eyes, "Wanna see my geckos?"

"Uh," Katsuki blinked, "Sure but I think Hitoshi wants to talk to me a bit first. Can you wait a second?"

"Okay," Kokeshi mumbled.

"Sorry again," Hitoshi said.

"It's cool," Katsuki said. "Sorry I came in without taking my shoes off. I was kind of dragged."

"Oh. Right," Hitoshi said, "There are some guest slippers at the door and hooks if you want to take off your jacket?"

"Cool," Katsuki said. He went and did that quickly enough. Tucking the shoes in a line with the others and hanging up the jacket, he looked up and caught Hitoshi standing off to the side, looking at him in that way he sometimes did.

Katsuki had noticed him doing it a lot more before they really knew each other well, as if Hitoshi became more embarrassed by his staring

once they'd become friends. Still, occasionally he would just stare at Katsuki, his eyes a little glazed over, attention fixed on something of Katsuki that he could never quite figure out.

He normally would have snapped at someone for doing that, but Katsuki found that he didn't mind too much. It was just what Hitoshi was like. He'd been doing that staring thing for as long as Katsuki had known him.

Hitoshi blinked and turned pink again when Katsuki walked back over to him. "Uh," he cleared his throat, "Dinner's almost ready. If you want we can-"

"Come see my geckos!" Kokeshi interrupted, "C'mon please? It'll only take a second! Please Hito-nii?"

Hitoshi sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose, "Katsuki, would you mind?"

"Sure," Katsuki said, "Lizards are cool."

Kokeshi beamed in delight and grabbed Katsuki's hand again, as he tugged him out of the room, he started listing what sounded like every conceivable fact about geckos that there was. Hitoshi trailed behind them with a kind of exasperated but amused expression. Katsuki listened to the kid spout lizard facts as he looked around where they walked. It looked like there was a door to another room here on this floor, but as Kokeshi led him through the main room, they reached more stairs up. Kokeshi broke up his chatter about lizards long enough to point out the rooms - "There's Hana-oneesan's room and there's Hito-nii's room and that room is Naku-neesan's room but she's not here much so sometimes Mama uses it as an office and there's the bathroom and this is my room! Kormit and Tally and Gerber are all in here with me!"

Kokeshi pushed open his door and herded Katsuki inside, over some toys on the floor and to a glass aquarium. It was filled with plants and sticks and dirt and Kokeshi got real close to the glass, pointing to one spot and whispering, "See? There's Gerber in the corner! He's the biggest and the oldest and Tally is over there under the rock but I can't see Kormit, hmm." He made a strange sort of whispery-hissing noise and Katsuki watched as a small gecko appeared from under a piece of driftwood. It turned so it could look at them with one of its golden eyes and blinked, tail twitching in apprehension.

"There he is!"

Katsuki glanced up to Hitoshi, who stood beside him. He didn't even have to ask his question as Hitoshi seemed to know what it was already.

"Kokeshi's quirk is communication with lizards. He's only really good with very small ones right now, but it'll probably develop stronger over time and use," Hitoshi said.

"That's pretty cool," Katsuki said.

Kokeshi beamed up at him, "Do you wanna hold one?"

"Nah," Katsuki said with a shake of his head, "My quirk makes my sweat kind of toxic to some animals, so I generally try not to handle them too much. Mammals can tolerate it better, but reptiles don't and amphibians really, *really* don't."

Kokeshi gave him huge, sorrowful eyes, "You can't hold frogs?"

"It's not good for them if I do," Katsuki said.

"That's so sad," Kokeshi said quietly, "Frogs are so soft and nice. Mama says if I learn how to talk to frogs too I can have one."

"Cool," Katsuki said.

"Speaking of Mom," Hitoshi interjected, "How about you go tell her it's about time to eat, Kokeshi?"

For a second the kid puffed out his cheeks and pouted but then he nodded. Letting his breath out in a rush he said, "Okaaaaaay."

"Thanks, bud," Hitoshi said and gave him a pat on the head. Kokeshi laughed a little and then trotted out of the room, leaving them alone.

Hitoshi opened his mouth but Katsuki cut him off before he could say anything, "If you apologize to me about your kid siblings one more time, Hitoshi, I am going to kick your ass. They're fine. They're not annoying me. They're actually kind of cute."

Hitoshi looked both relieved and chagrined. He rubbed at the back of his head and muttered, "They can be a handful. Mom says that they're not half as bad as Naku and I were at that age, but she's got to be exaggerating. I wasn't at all like Kokeshi when I was little. He's way more outgoing than I was."

"I used to be a real fucking dipshit when I was younger," Katsuki said

with a shrug, “That’s just how kids are. They’re dumb, noisy and a pain in the ass. But these ones are your kid siblings so I guess they’re all right.”

Hitoshi rolled his eyes. He changed the subject from the siblings abruptly, reaching up and plucking very lightly at Katsuki’s shirt collar. “I told you that you didn’t have to dress up, you know. Now I look bad in my stupid sweater.” He frowned, “Mom’s going to ask me to change so I’m not a disgrace.”

“You look fine,” Katsuki said. He couldn’t believe he was having this conversation; Hitoshi never seemed so nervous or insecure about stupid stuff like this before. “I think the sweater and apron look is a good one for you. You look all soft and approachable.”

Hitoshi blinked at him, then looked down at himself. “I do?”

“Yeah,” Katsuki said. “C’mon, let’s go and make sure they haven’t started without us. It’s got to be six by now.” He turned and headed out the door. When Hitoshi didn’t immediately follow him, Katsuki looked over his shoulder, “Hitoshi-”

“I’m coming,” Hitoshi hurried forward. He flipped the light off for Kokeshi’s room and followed Katsuki out into the hallway. Katsuki headed back down the stairs where the smell of cooking food made his mouth water. He went to the sitting area and found Hanashi setting out the dishes on the table Just So.

She smiled when he walked over, “Hi, Katsuki-nii!” she said, “Dad said dinner’s almost ready!”

Unbuttoning his cuffs and rolling up his long sleeves to his elbow, Katsuki nodded to her and then poked his head around into the kitchen. A rather tall man stood at the counter, also wearing an apron, and he was stirring something over a burner. He had short-cropped silver hair, but even so, he looked fairly young. “Is there something I can do to help?” Katsuki asked.

The man looked up, blinking in surprise and then smiling, “You must be Katsuki. Welcome to our home.” He looked around, “As for something to do, that dish there is ready for the table. You could-”

“I got it, I’m the one helping out,” Hitoshi said, coming in around Katsuki. “You’re the guest so go be a guest and sit at the table or something.” He made a little shooing motion with his hands, “Dad and I have this, Katsuki.” He went and picked up a towel, using it to lift

the hot dish that his father had indicated.

Chuckling, the man said, “By the way, my name is Kotoe. My wife is Usoshi.”

Katsuki gave a polite bow, “Bakugou Katsuki.”

“We’ve heard a lot about you,” a woman’s voice from behind Katsuki made his spine stiffen. He turned towards her and saw a middle-aged woman, with loose, dark violet hair that went to her shoulders. She leaned against the wall near the other side of the counter with a faint smile, arms folded across her abdomen. “Hitoshi’s quite fond of you.”

Hitoshi, ducking between the two of them to carry the dish to the table, didn’t say anything to dispute that. The tips of his ears were a bit red as he went past, but he moved quickly out of the way so Katsuki didn’t comment on that.

Besides, he was already aware that Hitoshi was acting a little weird. He was obviously nervous and wanted this to go well, which Katsuki could understand. *He* was on his best fucking behavior after all.

“Yeah?” He said, “Well that’s fucking fortunate because it’s pretty mutual.”

Usoshi’s smile grew slightly, “That is good to hear. You know, I always told him when he was younger not to worry too much about being on the outskirts of things.” She paused as Hitoshi moved between them again, headed back into the kitchen to pick up another dish and bring it to the table. “Some people are born more friendly than others and make friends more easily, but there simply are too many people for it to be impossible to make a long-lasting connection. It’s just a matter of timing, really.”

Hitoshi came back with a different container, he gave his mother a furtive glance as he passed by with the dish. Katsuki looked after him, frowning a little. But before he could comment, Kotoe stepped over to them, holding the last dish in his hands.

“Now Hitoshi and I have worked hard to make this meal for everyone,” Kotoe said, “So let’s sit down and enjoy it, hm?”

Katsuki had never had a family dinner like this one before. For one thing, he was an only child. For another, his mom liked to make lots of small dishes at dinner, usually one or two of them from some recipe that she had altered to “make it better”. For a third, the older he got, the more the conversations between he and his mother became heated and closer to arguments. His dad didn’t argue but didn’t help much to stop them from arguing, so usually, Katsuki had to decide to bite his tongue on something or just let his mom win whatever they were discussing. If his mom and his dad talked, they didn’t generally argue.

He’d seen family dinners on the TV plenty of times, dad at one end, mom at the other. The dad would be kind of grouchy and quiet and the mom would be fussing over the kids or the food or serving everybody or whatever. One kid would be the sulky teen, the other would be the messy baby and the one in the middle would usually be the main character and so a snarky, self-centered brat of a kid.

Dinner at the Shinsou table wasn’t like dinner at the Bakugous and it wasn’t like any dinner Katsuki had seen on TV either.

For one thing, Kotoe sat to Usoshi’s left, with her at the head of the table. Hitoshi ended up at the other end of the table with Hanashi between him and Kotoe and Katsuki across from her. Kokeshi had claimed the spot between Katsuki and Usoshi, delighted to be next to “Katsu-nii.”

Food was served and thanks were given, which was usual, and chatter started up almost immediately. Hanashi had no trouble absolutely dominating the conversation. She had updates on a half dozen friends, on her classes, on her plants -it turned out she had a plant-related quirk of some kind- and she wanted everyone to be up to date on her life. Kotoe and Usoshi fielded most of her questions or comments, asking her about this thing or that event, generally displaying not only an interest in her life but knowledge about it.

Kokeshi played with his food, mostly, talked with his mouth full, sometimes, and liked to interject with lizard facts and related jokes. Katsuki lost track of the number of jokes the kid told after he’d hit ten. It was kind of irritating but at least the kid didn’t ask him to answer every one of them.

Hitoshi was quiet. Katsuki was used to him being quiet but he was kind of worried about it too. He would look over to him and see Hitoshi watching him and if he quirked an eyebrow in order to invite Hitoshi to spill the beans, Hitoshi just shook his head or shrugged. He

did talk; he wasn't absolutely silent, but he wasn't chatty at all. He answered direct questions and gave kind of vague updates when pressed, but there was lots of shrugging.

Katsuki figured it was just him trying not to freak out over what was going on, which, whatever. Hitoshi was allowed to be nervous. Katsuki could be understanding about it.

The parents didn't interrogate him like Katsuki half expected them to. Maybe they were just waiting until the other kids were gone or something, but dinner was benign topics like what class was like and how did he enjoy school and how long had he wanted to be a Hero and what were his favorite books/movies/things. They didn't bring up the kidnapping at all, which Katsuki had braced himself for.

The food was really, *really* good. Katsuki's portion of the curry sauce had been made to an ideal level of spice - Kotoe had said it was Nakushi's preferred spice level so not impossible to make for him - and all the rest of it had been cooked perfectly. He ate his fill happily, wondering how much Kotoe had made and how much Hitoshi had helped with. Hitoshi usually brought his own lunch but Katsuki had never thought to ask if it was because he made it himself or because his parents did.

There was even a dessert, some sort of frozen fruit sherbet thing that Hanashi declared to be The Best Treat Of All Time when describing it to Katsuki. It, too, was pretty good and tasted of peaches. The first real moment of pleased silence came when everyone dug into the frozen treat at the same time. Hanashi hummed and Kokeshi wiggled in his seat and even the parents smiled happily. Katsuki found himself smiling, looking over to Hitoshi, who, while his face was a little flushed, smiled back.

All in all, it was a good dinner.

There was no heated discussion that led to an argument that led to thrown dishes or someone storming off. There was no tense, uncomfortable silence that came from an abruptly cut off shouting match before it got too out of hand. There was plenty to eat and no cutting remarks on being picky about this weird dish or that weird dish.

It was nice. Really nice.

Katsuki kind of wanted to visit again. He liked Hitoshi's family.

Katsuki helped the little kids clear the table after dinner while Kotoe put away the leftovers and Hitoshi helped his mother do dishes. She was washing some of the bigger dishware and the pots that had been used to cook in while Hitoshi loaded up the dishwasher with what the kids and Katsuki brought over. Nearly everything was done in a few minutes and even though Hanashi and Kokeshi tried to urge Katsuki to run off and play with them, he lingered behind.

He was there to be with Hitoshi, after all, not with the kids.

Kotoe herded them off into the other section of the room, behind the thin divider and over to the kotatsu. Katsuki could hear the TV come on and some chatter about what to watch, but he tuned it out to listen to Usoshi and Hitoshi instead.

She was scrubbing at something, wearing long rubber gloves with her hair pulled back into a loose bun. Without looking up from her scrubbing, she spoke to Hitoshi, “You’ve everything you need, right? Whatever you’ll want them to take over to the dorms you’ll need to have set aside tonight. Anything you want to leave here just put in the office and we’ll take care of it later.”

“There’s some stuff I need to pack up still,” Hitoshi said as he bent over to load the dishwasher, “But most of it's ready to go.”

“How about you, Katsuki?” Usoshi asked, briefly glancing over her shoulder at him, “Are you moving into the dorms too?”

“Yeah,” he said, “My shit’s ready to go already.” It was what he’d spent most of the day doing. He was a little surprised to hear that general studies was being put in a dorm too, but it made sense to put all the students in dorms. There was already enough social divide between the different courses. “They said they’d come get it all during the school day and let us set it up after classes.”

She nodded, “It’s quite a coordinated effort on the part of the school. They must have had plans for dorms for a while to be able to pull everything together so quickly.”

“Three days doesn’t seem like long enough to make sure the buildings are actually secure,” Hitoshi muttered, “I’d rather it have been a week-

long so no corners were cut."

"I'm sure they're aware of the risks of such a quick build," Usoshi said, "They'll have a worse problem than a villain attack if something happens in the dorms and a student is hurt and it turns out the building was shoddily made and the cause for the damage. There's too much precedent for that kind of thing for them to squeak by without any consequences. Now, Yuuei's very popular and has a lot of pull so it could be just a slap on the wrist, but that depends on what kind of damage happens."

"Does that kind of thing happen a lot?" Katsuki asked, "Buildings falling over because they were made too quickly and people suing because of it?"

"Oh certainly," Usoshi said, "You wouldn't believe how many cases I see about that sort of thing. Even with quirks, people like to make their jobs easier by cutting as many corners as they can while making money. Not everyone, not every company, but enough of them that the building regulations that incorporate buildings made with quirks tend to be more strict than those without."

Hitoshi closed the dishwasher and pushed a button on it before he said, "Mom's a lawyer for civil disputes so she sees a bunch of liability things a lot." He pulled off his apron and said, "Dishes are loaded, table's clear. Katsuki and I are going to go to my room for a while, okay?"

Usoshi looked at her son and whatever Look she gave him, Hitoshi's face reddened but he stubbornly held his chin out. Katsuki frowned a little but he stopped doing that when Usoshi turned and looked at him instead. Katsuki instinctively straightened up under her attention.

"I didn't want to bring this up in front of the two little ones," she said quietly, "because they weren't here when it happened, thank goodness, but… I was with Hitoshi when the broadcasts were made before the attack in Kamino. Katsuki, I want you to know I'm very glad you're all right and hope that you know that in this family, we understand that Heroes can be a little unorthodox." She walked over, peeling off her left glove as she did so. Putting her hand on Katsuki's shoulder she smiled at him gently, "I'm glad you're my son's friend and I hope we get to see you come around more often."

Katsuki nodded his head numbly, "Thanks," he mumbled out. "I guess I can visit some more."

“Wonderful,” she said. She stepped back, “You two go enjoy yourselves. Katsuki, when do you need to head home tonight?”

He shrugged, “Before the last bus and train, I guess.”

“All right, we’ll make sure that happens.” She went back to the sink, pulling her glove back on and humming as she finished up.

Katsuki blinked a few times, trying to recover from that sincerity and jumped when Hitoshi took his hand.

“My room’s this way,” Hitoshi mumbled as he tugged Katsuki after him. They went through the dining area, back up the stairs and to one of the other rooms on the third floor. Katsuki let Hitoshi lead him by the hand, turning his own only so he could hold Hitoshi’s in return.

Once they reached Hitoshi’s room, which had several labeled cardboard boxes on one side and was devoid of most clutter, Katsuki was surprised to see a cat curled up on the end of the bed. She opened one eye, then the other, and then stretched out as Hitoshi went over to her.

Hitoshi picked her up and held her in his arms as he turned to Katsuki, “This is Saeko. She’s almost nine years old now so all she likes to do is sleep on my bed.”

Katsuki went up and held out his hand to the cat. She sniffed his knuckles and then turned and rubbed her cheek against his hand. Smiling, he pet her head and back. “She’s pretty cute.”

Hitoshi cuddled her a little more before putting her down on the bed where she stretched and then sat down to watch them.

He turned and gestured to the room, “So this is my room. It’s mostly packed up but yeah.”

“Mine looks pretty much the same with all the boxes,” Katsuki looked around and then decided to sit down on the bed. “It’s fucking wild they just built dorms and plan to move everyone into them in less than a week.”

Hitoshi sat down beside him and stretched his legs out, “Yeah. It kind of sucks on the timing because I wasn’t planning on having everything boxed up when you were here but I really don’t want my shit boxed up by some dudes hired to move it, you know? Even if the school's hiring them, I still don’t really like it.”

“It’s going to be so weird living in dorms,” Katsuki said, “I don’t- I’m an only kid so my house is usually pretty quiet as long as Mom’s not bitching about something.”

“Will you…” Hitoshi hesitated, biting his lip for a second, then pushed through and said, “Will you want to hang out when we’re in the dorms? We’ll be closer so we can see each other more outside of class.”

Katsuki looked up at the ceiling, imagining his idiot classmates reacting to him bringing Hitoshi around. Again, it was a weird split of confused and indifferent and curious. He had a feeling they’d be more weirded out because it was *him* bringing Hitoshi around and not, say, Deku or somebody more friendly. “I don’t see why we can’t,” he said after a while, “If I can avoid my classmates by hanging out in your dorm more, it sounds like a win-win to me.”

Things were quiet for another minute and Katsuki was debating lying back on the bed for comfort’s sake when Hitoshi said, “Do you- Do you not want your classmates to know we’re friends?”

Katsuki frowned, “What do you mean?” He turned to look at Hitoshi, but Hitoshi was half turned away. He was petting his cat, staring down at her as she lay curled up against his side, purring.

“I…” Hitoshi began, “I don’t know. I just- I know you don’t like your classmates much and you don’t want to be around them but sometimes it just… It feels like you’re hiding our friendship from them for some other reason. Like you don’t want them to know that I’m close to you.”

“What?”

“It’s- It’s stupid,” Hitoshi said quickly, “It’s just.” He glanced at Katsuki and the expression he wore made Katsuki’s guts tighten up. “You’re not- It’s not embarrassing for you that we’re friends, right? You’re not ashamed of me or anything?”

Katsuki stared at him. Of all the idiotic… “The only time it's embarrassing to be your friend is when your dumbass sister is making a fool of herself with us in tow. *You’re* not embarrassing. You’re fucking weird and you’re apparently fucking sensitive as hell but I still fucking care about you and I don’t care what people think about that.”

“But you haven’t told your classmates about us.”

“Because they either won't fucking believe me or they’ll fucking pity you for being stuck with me or they won’t give a shit,” Katsuki snapped. “Look, it’s-” He dragged his hand through his hair and reigned in his temper enough so he didn’t start shouting. “It’s fucking hard for me to keep my cool in class, okay? I have Deku at my fucking back like all the fucking time and I’m not good at dealing with that. Just seeing him makes my blood boil sometimes and I start shouting and then after a while everyone just kind of expects me to be loud and angry and violent so I just- They expect it and accept it when I do it so they just leave me alone. Kirishima doesn’t because he’s an optimistic moron like Deku but without all of my baggage about Deku around him so it’s possible to not *always* be an asshole to him.

“What I’m trying to fucking say is if I show up with you in tow, they’re all going to fucking think that I’ve bullied you into being around me somehow and they’ll feel sorry for you or try to keep you away from me. They won’t get it. They’ll just be annoying and I don’t want to deal with that on top of everything else.”

“Is your… Is your baggage with Deku really that bad?” Hitoshi asked, apparently willing to move topics. Katsuki wouldn’t have minded that if it had been any other topic than Deku.

He looked away from Hitoshi, staring down at the floor instead. “It’s pretty fucking bad,” he muttered. “I was… I was the worst sort of person to Deku and I still am and I still- I still hate him but I don’t hate him at the same time and it's… It’s fucked up. I wish he was in any other fucking class than mine so I could have some fucking space from him but I can’t. And everyone in my class likes him and hates me so it’s not like I have anywhere there I can turn to.”

“You know that I- I don’t hate him, right?”

“I’m not an idiot, Hitoshi,” Katsuki ground out, “I fucking know that. But you aren’t sucking up to him or praising his stupid new quirk or his brain or calling him adorable or admiring him like everyone in class. He’s the fucking class favorite and he’s too thick in the skull to even fucking realize it.”

“Oh,” Hitoshi said, “I guess I see. I didn’t realize it was that bad between you two.”

Katsuki rubbed his face with one hand, “I think he fucking wants to bury the hatchet, which makes it so much worse because if he wants to move on after all the shit I did and said to him and I say no, well

I'm just an- an incorrigible bastard I guess. I honestly fucking considered dropping out of Yuuei for my second choice high school when I found out he was in my class and he wasn't fucking going anywhere. He- He never had a quirk while we were growing up. *He wasn't supposed to be there* and then he *was* and it- It fucking changed everything for me."

He went quiet when Hitoshi put his hand on his shoulder and squeezed.

Katsuki leaned into that touch, hanging his head with his hand over his face. He didn't question why he felt comfortable talking about this with Hitoshi. It wasn't like they were strangers; they sat together on Hitoshi's fucking bed, after all. Katsuki hadn't felt closer to anyone else in his whole life. Besides, if Hitoshi could open up about feeling insecure, Katsuki could do the same.

After a moment of stillness, Hitoshi's hand ran soothingly across his shoulder blades.

Sighing, Katsuki straightened up, "Fuck that's enough emotional shit," he felt a twinge of regret as Hitoshi's hand fell away from his back but he covered it up by stretching his arms high over his head and arching his back. When he'd finished his stretch, he flopped back onto Hitoshi's bed, feet off the side and his arms behind his head. "I've basically decided that they can figure it out on their own if they want, but I'm just going to keep doing what I want with you in the meantime."

He turned his head to smirk up at Hitoshi and caught him with that sort of dazed look on his face again. Hitoshi was staring down at him attentively, except his eyes were on Katsuki's middle, not his face. Katsuki looked at him silently for a while and then propped himself up enough on one elbow to look down at himself and guess what Hitoshi was staring at.

Katsuki had dressed up a little nicer than normal for this dinner and hang-out. He'd worn one of his dark red button-down shirts and had tucked it into his pants this afternoon. During his last stretch, his shirt had pulled free of the tuck and rode up a few inches at his waist, revealing the skin beneath.

It was here that Hitoshi stared. Just like he'd stared when Katsuki had rolled up his sleeves, or taken off his outer jacket, or that time he'd gone jogging the track without a shirt on or sometimes when Katsuki

was shirtless while putting on his pants in the locker room, or that time he had been doing stretches on the mountain and- *Oh.*

"Hitoshi?" Katsuki asked, feeling a little lightheaded as he spoke, "Do you like me?"

Hitoshi blinked a few times, looked a little guilty when he met Katsuki's gaze and then said, "Uh. Yes? Of course I do. We're friends, aren't we?"

"Yeah but I mean in a gay way," Katsuki let his cheek rest on his own shoulder as he watched Hitoshi's expression shift from shock to something pretty close to guilt, "Do you like me *that* way?"

Hitoshi wouldn't meet his gaze. He stared off to the side, the color rising on his cheeks, up from his neck and headed for his ears, "Why do you think that?"

"I don't really get it the way that I guess other people do," Katsuki said, "But I've noticed the way you look at me. Even back when we didn't know each other, you would stare at me. I didn't care then because I didn't really know what it meant but I guess I know now and…" He shrugged, "It would make the staring make sense, if you did like me that way."

Hitoshi put a hand over his face, utterly silent and still. Katsuki watched him for a while, waiting for him to say something, *anything.*

With his hand muffling his words, Hitoshi said, "I didn't realize you had noticed. Sorry for making you uncomfortable."

"Hitoshi," Katsuki said, "Fucking look at me."

Hitoshi tensed up but then looked at him, moving stiffly like he was having to force himself to do it. He stared at Katsuki.

Katsuki, elbows propping him up but otherwise completely reclining on Hitoshi's bed, spread his hands and said, "Do I *look* like I'm fucking uncomfortable?"

Hitoshi glanced down his body and then quickly back up to Katsuki's face. He shook his head.

"Right," Katsuki said, "So can you answer my fucking question now? Do you fucking like me or not?"

Hitoshi shrugged one shoulder. The collar of his sweater pulled along with it, showing some of the smooth skin of his shoulder and dipping to his collarbone. Katsuki blinked so *he* didn't get caught staring and gave an annoyed sigh.

"Fine, whatever," Katsuki said, "Keep it to yourself if you gotta but don't get mad at me when you realize you could've made a fucking move instead of fucking staring at me all the time like I'm *not* sprawled on your fucking *bed,* Hitoshi." Then he flopped back again, lifting his arms and putting his hands behind his head again.

It took Hitoshi a second to compute what Katsuki said but when he had he turned towards him and leaned in, bracing himself with one hand as he glared down at Katsuki, "What are you talking about? You don't- Do you even know what you're saying?"

Katsuki closed his eyes, smirking, "Of course I know what I'm saying."

"You said you didn't- You don't *like* people like that! You basically implied you didn't even get attracted to people," Hitoshi said, "So what changed?"

Katsuki shrugged, "I dunno. I guess I got over it."

Hitoshi made a strangled noise of anger so Katsuki opened one eye to look up at him. Hitoshi held his face in his hands, eyes squeezed shut, "You don't just get over this kind of thing, Katsuki. It doesn't work like that."

"Well I did," Katsuki said, "I got over it and I get it now." He opened his other eye, looking at Hitoshi's bare shoulder. He really liked a comfort-dressed Hitoshi in his oversized sweater. It was cute.

Dropping his hands, Hitoshi glared at him some more, "What do you mean you *get it now?* What the fuck does that mean?"

"It means I get it now," Katsuki said. He pulled one hand free and lazily gestured to Hitoshi. "I look at you and I get how people want to be like, sappy and romantic with each other. I didn't get it before and so it seemed like a waste of time to be with someone like that but now I get it."

"So now you get wanting to date someone because you look at me?" Hitoshi sounded as confused as he looked. He ran a hand through his hair and it honestly looked like he was about to start pulling it out. "But why? I didn't- I've never- What did I do?"

Slowly, Katsuki pushed himself up to a half-sitting position again. Hitoshi leaned back a little to give him space but he didn't scoot away. Katsuki reached up and, with a single finger, traced the edge of Hitoshi's sweater's collar from the back around to the front. His fingertip ran over skin that was just as smooth as he'd thought it to be. When his hand reached Hitoshi's neck, he ran his knuckles up the side and up to Hitoshi's ear. He could feel the shiver that prickled Hitoshi's skin.

Katsuki rubbed Hitoshi's earlobe between his thumb and forefinger, distantly remembering the hot sun, the smell of sunscreen, the way Hitoshi had rubbed his ear with warm, lingering hands. He smiled at the memory.

He smiled even more at the dazed look Hitoshi gave him.

"I don't know what it was that changed for me," Katsuki said quietly, "Maybe it was one thing or a lot of little things. I do know that I don't think I would feel this way about anyone else. I don't feel as comfortable with anyone else as I do with you. So when I look at you, I get it because it makes sense. If this is what people feel like when they look at the people they date or whatever, yeah, I fucking get it."

Hitoshi's eyes fluttered shut again as he sat there with Katsuki's hand against his skin. He was breathing, which was good, but hadn't said anything, which was beginning to make Katsuki worry. What if, and fuck him if this was true, but what if Hitoshi *didn't* like him that way? What if he *was* just a space case and stared at Katsuki but was thinking about anything else?

What if their comfortable relationship was more one-sided than Katsuki had realized?

"Yes," Hitoshi whispered after an endless minute of silence.

"What?"

"The answer to your question," Hitoshi opened his eyes and met Katsuki's, "Is yes. I *do* like you that way. I- I think I have for a while. I just- I didn't think you'd ever reciprocate." He huffed out a sharp breath, "You couldn't even tell me what kind of person you would like, Katsuki. I figured you would never be interested so I didn't want to- To make things awkward."

Katsuki gave Hitoshi's ear a tug. "Ask me again."

“Ouch, what?” Hitoshi grabbed Katsuki’s wrist, frowning at him.

“Ask me what kind of person I like again,” Katsuki said, leaning in as he did.

“Fine,” Hitoshi said, “What kind of person *do* you like, Katsuki?”

Katsuki smirked as he closed the distance between them, “Your kind,” he said, just before pressing his lips to Hitoshi’s.

Katsuki had never kissed anyone before. It had never been important to him. It wasn’t the kind of affection he was used to or thought of. Kissing never seemed interesting. But it was different with Hitoshi.

Lots of things were different with Hitoshi.

He knew he was supposed to close his eyes, so he did that as he pressed his mouth to Hitoshi’s. He knew he was supposed to turn his head to the side a bit so their noses didn’t smoosh together too much. Those two things were pretty much the limit of his knowledge, though.

So the softness of Hitoshi’s mouth surprised him. The warmth of it did also. The feeling of Hitoshi’s breath on his face was strange. The pressure against his own lips made his skin prickle. The way that Hitoshi leaned in to kiss him a second time, his fingers curling into the front of Katsuki’s shirt with a sort of eagerness that Katsuki could relate to made his heart pound in his chest.

He let Hitoshi pull his hand down out of the way. He turned his hand in the grip so that his fingers interlaced with Hitoshi’s. He brought his other hand up, ran it over Hitoshi’s exposed shoulder and to the back of his neck and couldn’t stop from grinning when he felt that shiver ripple through Hitoshi again.

And all the while he kept kissing him, over and over and over and *over* and Katsuki was pretty convinced that this was the best thing he’d ever thought to do before in his life because Hitoshi was warm and smelled good and kept kissing him back and everything about this moment was absolute perfection.

When they finally pulled back it was to catch their breath and stare at each other. Hitoshi’s cheeks were flushed pink and Katsuki could tell his were the same. He felt warm and giddy and- and safe. He felt *safe*. Really safe for the first time since the kidnapping.

Hitoshi made him feel safe.

Closing his eyes again, Katsuki leaned in until his forehead rested against Hitoshi's shoulder. He could feel Hitoshi hold still for a moment and then the hand that had been holding onto his shirt reached up and trailed through Katsuki's hair on the back of his head and down the nape of his neck.

"Katsuki?" he asked quietly.

"Mmm?"

"Can we- Can we kiss some more?"

Katsuki snorted. What a greedy fucker Hitoshi was. But it wasn't like he wanted to say no himself. "Sure," he said as he lifted his head back up. "Just kiss?"

Hitoshi smirked at him. "For now."

Katuski leaned in and kissed that smirk off of his lips.

Unveiling the Truth

Chapter Summary

> Ochako is front and center when the Truth Comes Out about Bakugou.

Ochako is *pretty* sure that there are multiple reasons for why they should not be stalking Bakugou's weekend activities in order to figure out who his girlfriend is.

For one thing, Bakugou's absence from the dorm means that the dorm itself is pretty chill most of the time. He's never really around to cause a ruckus and he's diligent about doing his chores there, if somewhat unusual in the timing (honestly, who vacuums at six in the morning? Bakugou is just so rude). Besides the noise, he's not a bad dorm-mate or whatever- he cleans up after himself in the kitchen, he's never bringing over weird people from other classes (not that Ochako could even imagine him paying enough attention to the other classes to know someone well enough to bring over) and he doesn't go out of his way to be an asshole as far as she can tell.

Stalking him seems like it would lead to him becoming an asshole at their new home and she's not super thrilled by that prospect.

Additionally, she thinks it kind of makes sense for him to have not told them he was seeing anyone. Only Kirishima can get Bakugou to talk to him for more than a few minutes at a time and with the least amount of swearing or threats. He still pretty much either ignores Deku or shouts him down and only Todoroki gets the occasional glance of attention from Bakugou, usually angry ones, as far as she can tell. She thinks he probably is nursing a grudge from the Sports Festival but maybe not, maybe it's something else.

Bakugou doesn't pay any attention to any of the girls in the class, as far as Ochako can tell, which *could* mean that he had a girlfriend and so wasn't interested in them. Maybe the girlfriend was a jealous type so he ignored all other women. Maybe the girlfriend was only online so he was embarrassed about her and didn't want to bring her up. Maybe the girlfriend was an older woman and so he had to keep it secret.

The fact was that she didn't know Bakugou well enough, *none* of them knew Bakugou well enough, to be able to determine if he had a

girlfriend or if he was just getting into weird fights with someone (or multiple someones) who liked to bite people. Not even Deku knew for sure, having only the knowledge that once, in middle school, for exactly two and a half days, Bakugou had had some girlfriend from the next class over whose name was Naomi and who had some sort of physical quirk that manifested in really sharp teeth.

So maybe, just maybe, (and Ochako was a little horrified that she had thought of this) but maybe Bakugou had a thing for teeth.

And if he did, and if he had any other kinks, Ochako *really* didn't want to know.

She also thought it was kind of rude to stalk your classmates, no matter how weird they were. *She* didn't want to be followed because she started going out somewhere every couple of nights or something. What if one of the rest of them started dating and wanted to keep it private? Would they stalk that classmate to find out what was going on? Or was it because it was Bakugou that everyone was okay with it?

Ochako's reservations were such that she dawdled at the back of the group of them as they headed out on a Saturday, trailing Bakugou with the help of that tracker someone had salvaged from that time that Bakugou got kidnapped. Momo had been visibly uneasy when they'd asked her to make another, but she still had part of the first one and Mina had managed to talk her around to it.

Mina was at the front of the group, up there with Denki and Kirishima and Mineta for some reason. Deku had bowed out of the activity, but Ochako had agreed to go before he'd done so. She was hoping he'd be there to help her keep things from getting out of hand, which maybe Jirou could help with, but the other girl seemed mostly disinterested in what was going on. Momo hadn't come with them but Tooru had. So they had a pretty good sized group, which meant that the tracker was really necessary.

There was no way that Bakugou wouldn't notice them if they were less than a block away from him. Maybe one of them could have tracked him from closer up and relayed his movements back but-

"He's stopped moving!" Mina hissed, going to a stop and holding up the tracker. The others huddled around her and then started looking around.

They were in a part of town that Ochako didn't quite recognize but had lots of little shops up and down the street. Some of the alleyways

she could see looked as though they opened out to other more hidden shops. There were plenty of people out on this pretty Saturday, some on dates and some alone and some with friends or family. Mina handed the tracker to Tooru. “It’s your time to shine, Tooru! Find out what restaurant he’s in and try and get a picture of who he’s with!”

“Aye aye!” Tooru said cheerfully. She pulled out the scrunchy in her hair so that she was entirely invisible from the shoulders up. Then she took off her jacket, revealing a strapless shirt that would’ve revealed a midriff if she wasn’t invisible and handed that to Mina. With the tracker in her hand, Tooru vanished off down one of the alleys.

Jirou pointed to a nearby stall, “Anyone else want ice cream while we wait?”

“Ooh!” Mina said excitedly, “Let’s get some!”

They went over as a group towards the stand. A few minutes later, they had all ordered and were off to the side of the street, trying to stay out of the way of other shoppers and also remain close for when Tooru came out.

Ochako was about half done with her ice cream when she spotted Tooru’s shirt bobbing out of the narrow alleyway and out into the street. She lifted her hand up and waved, which made the others turn, look, and wave as well. Tooru rushed over, bouncing with excitement.

“It’s a date, it’s a date!” she cried as she reached them. “I got some pictures of the two of them and I snuck in a little to try and listen in and she was telling him stuff about buying flowers! It’s a date! He’s on a date!”

Mina squealed and rushed forward to hug Tooru. “I knew it! Show us the pictures!”

Excitedly, Tooru handed Kirishima the tracker and pulled out her phone and swiped it open with her fingerprint. She flipped to the pictures and turned the phone around to show them. Ochako leaned in to look over Denki’s shoulder and was somehow surprised to see Bakugou sitting at a bar of some noodle place next to a petite young woman. While the others exclaimed as Tooru swiped through the pictures, Ochako found herself dumbstruck by how relaxed and *happy* Bakugou looked. He had a sort of half-smile as he was turned towards the girl, who had one hand up in the middle of some sort of blurry motion while she laughed at something. Had Bakugou said something

funny? Or was she just a naturally cheerful girl?

“She’s actually kind of pretty,” Denki said in amazement. “Like, not bad Bakugou. What a catch!”

“She’s shorter than I thought she’d be,” Kirishima said, “I don’t know why but I figured Bakugou would date some big buff lady or something.”

“That sounds more like someone you would date, Kirishima,” Jirou said, “She looks nice. How did Bakugou find her?”

“You didn’t get any front pictures, Tooru?” Mineta whined, “We can barely see her tits from this angle!”

Mina smacked him, “Don’t be so crude Mineta! Or I’ll tell Bakugou you were ogling his girlfriend and he’ll blow you into space!”

Mineta paled, “But the tits are important! Why date her if she’s got such small ones?”

Ignoring him, Tooru said, “I think I overheard Bakugou say her name, too! He called her Naku! And she was calling him Katsuki-kun! She was so chatty too!”

“Hey guys?” Kirishima said suddenly, “I think he’s on the move again!” He showed them the tracker, which had begun to move and beep. They stared at it for a few seconds and yup. It was definitely moving. Bakugou was coming closer.

“We gotta move!” Denki shouted and he hurried off. Ochako reached for him, hand snatching the back of his jacket as she pulled him back.

“Not that way!” she said, “That’s the alley where he is! We gotta go the other way!”

They hurried away from the alleyway, moving up the street quickly but trying not to draw too much attention to themselves. Mina hissed for them to all scatter and soon they had split up towards different shops to hide and still see the street.

It was just in time, too, as Bakugou and his girlfriend came out of the alleyway.

In the pictures, her hair had looked kind of grey but in the sunlight, it was a pretty lavender color that Ochako was a little bit jealous of. She

seemed so confident too, wearing a sporty, bright colored jacket and some short shorts and tall, knee-high boots with thick heels on them. The heeled boots put her up enough inches to make her and Bakugou the same height. She seemed to still be talking as animatedly as she had been in Tooru's pictures, hands flitting through the air as she chattered away.

Ochako couldn't see Bakugou's face from where she was crouched behind a shelf and peering through a window, Denki only a few inches away from her, but he had his hands loosely in his pockets and wore a sleeveless shirt. He was angled slightly towards her, head tilted a little bit and Ochako just Knew he was actually listening to her. Like, he was really paying attention to her. It was so crazy to see.

They walked across the street to the same ice cream place that the group had gone to and Ochako watched with surprise as Bakugou and his date both ordered and *he* paid for the ice cream. It was *Absolutely* a date.

The proof was undeniable. Bakugou had a girlfriend.

"She's got to be a third-year or something," Denki whispered from beside her, "She doesn't look our age but she's not some old lady either. Maybe she goes to a different school?"

"She's super pretty," Ochako whispered, "How did he meet her? Or do you think she went after him? I mean, he was the winner of the Sports Festival- there's a possibility she found him that way and thought he was attractive or something."

Denki gave her a confused look, "Him? Attractive? After how he acted at the Sports Festival?"

Ochako shrugged, "I don't know. There's someone out there for everyone. She seems nice but maybe she's into bad boys."

"Oh yeah, so she's going for the top of the class, Mr. Does-All-His-Homework-and-Aces-All-His-Tests Bakugou. He's not a bad boy, he's just mean."

"Some people consider that the same thing," she said.

After getting the ice cream, the woman looped her arm in Bakugou's. He gave her an exasperated look but *let her drag him off.* They headed away down the street, disappearing into the crowd.

To be careful, Ochako waited another minute or two before she crept out of her hiding place. Denki followed her as they went back out into the street.

They met up with the others at the corner of a building. Mina was staring down at her phone and Kirishima was looking at the tracker.

“I think we have enough photographic evidence to figure out who she is,” Mina said, “If she goes to our school or one of the other schools, we’ve got her face so we should be able to track her down!”

“They’re moving over towards the park,” Kirishima said, “Should we continue to follow them?”

“I don’t think we should push our luck,” Ochako said, “Why don’t we head back and show the others the picture of her. Maybe someone back at the dorm has seen her and knows who this Naku is.”

“That sounds like a great idea,” Mina said as she put her phone away. “Let’s head out of here!”

“Wait,” Tooru said, “I want to get ice cream first! You guys all got yours, I want some too!” Then she turned and walked off to the ice cream stand. The very same one that Bakugou had just gone to.

“He’s actually got a girlfriend,” Kirishima said to himself, “If I hadn’t seen it with my own eyes I don’t think I really would’ve believed it.”

“Haven’t you seen the bite marks he has?” Jirou asked with an arched eyebrow.

Kirishima flushed, “That’s different! He could’ve gotten them anywhere.”

“He got them from that girl,” Jirou said, “Most likely anyway.”

Ochako bit her lip. She didn’t think it was possible, but she wanted to meet that girl herself. She really wanted to know what kind of person could date Bakugou. And what was that like? Was he not an asshole to her too? Was he a totally different person? Or did he still act the same? She had so many questions!

She really hoped someone would recognize her. She wanted to know more!

As expected, no one recognized the girl.

Mina managed to print one of her pictures out from when they were ordering ice cream and cropped out Bakugou so she could share it around the dorm, but no one recognized her. She started passing the picture around to other classes too, but no matter who Mina showed it to, no one knew the lavender haired girl that Bakugou was dating.

She didn't tell everyone that she was Bakugou's date, which Ochako figured was the smartest move they'd had yet. Still, no one recognized the woman at all, which frustrated Mina to no end.

Ochako had mixed feelings on that. She wanted to know this girl, she really did. But she didn't think it was a good idea to get into Bakugou's personal life. It seemed like, well, lighting a stick of dynamite that was glued to your hand.

Bakugou clearly preferred to keep his personal life as private as possible. Intruding on that would only be trouble.

It was Ochako's turn to make dinner for her, Tooru, Mina and Tsuyu, but when she went down to the kitchen, someone was already cooking.

Not just someone. Bakugou.

He looked up at her when she approached but didn't explode at her or shout at her to go, which probably meant he was in a good mood. He even shuffled his foodstuff over to one side as she got out hers, leaving her a decent amount of counter space to work on. Ochako gave him a friendly smile and got to work washing vegetables and preparing everything for cooking so she could get it done as quickly as possible.

She tried not to look at what he was doing too much but snuck glances at him periodically. It took a few minutes for her to realize that he wasn't actually making dinner. He was making his lunch for the next day. He had two pairs of bentos set aside, half-filled with some cute cut vegetables already. It looked like he was making two different bentos with two layers, one with the main food and one

probably for the rice he'd make in the morning. At least, that's what she assumed.

He didn't say anything as he cooked, stirring what looked like marinated pork around on a pan on the stove, but Ochako… well, Ochako had to at least try and ask.

"What are you making for dinner, Bakugou?" she smiled as she asked, "It smells good."

"It's not dinner," he replied, not looking up from the pan. "And it's pork."

"So you're making yourself lunch?" she asked, pretending to be mostly focused on the vegetable chopping she was doing.

He grunted in response.

"Only that seems like a lot of food to eat for lunch, even for you."

Silence for a moment. Ochako peeked up at him. He scowled at his pan.

"And what's it to you?" he asked, "I'm not fucking going to share if that's what you want."

"Is that lunch for you and your…. Close friend?" She couldn't say *girlfriend* to him. At least not to his face.

Slowly, Bakugou lifted his chin. He met her gaze and stared at her. Ochako held her ground. Her hand tightened on the carrots she held.

"And what if it is?" he asked, "What are you gonna do about it?"

"Oh, nothing," she said quickly, "I was just curious. Maybe you should bring them over for dinner sometime! I'm sure any friend of yours is bound to be interesting!"

Bakugou's eyes narrowed.

"I mean, if you can't invite them over to join us for lunch for some reason, why not try dinner instead? There's no real rule against visitors you know."

"So the lot of you can pester us with questions? No thanks," he said, "I know you're all fucking weird about what I do with my life but it's none of your fucking business. You and the rest of the class can fuck

off." He turned to the pan and flipped the meat over, scowling down at it.

"You know," Ochako said lightly, "People can always tell when you make food with love or if you make it with bitterness in your heart. They can taste how you feel about them in the food you make for them." She said it mostly because her mother had said it to her many times before but also because she thought it was true. Making and giving food to someone was a display of love and food always tastes better when made with love.

Bakugou looked like he was cooking his mostly with spite and distrust.

He grunted at her and refused to otherwise respond, but she saw his scowl ease up.

He didn't say another word while he finished cooking, not even when Momo came down to make her own dinner and he shuffled his stuff closer together to give her room too. Momo gave them both curious glances and politely replied when Ochako talked to her. She even asked Ochako for some tips, displaying some unease being in the kitchen.

Then again, Momo was rich enough to definitely have servants at home, so Ochako didn't feel too bad in showing her how to cut up some vegetables safely. By the time she'd helped Momo with most of her prep work and had cooked her own dinner, Bakugou and his bento were long gone.

And just like Ochako had known he would, Bakugou had cleaned up after himself, leaving no trace he had done anything there at all.

Grumpy and mean as he was, he was a better housemate than some of her own siblings!

Ochako really, *really* wanted to know what kind of girl made Bakugou happy to cook for her, though. She had to be really amazing!

Ochako was walking with Izuku and Tenya back from the library when she saw a glimpse of familiar lavender out of the corner of her

eye. Without even stopping to think about it, she grabbed the arms of her two friends and hauled them off of the walkway and into a bush nearby. They both gave yelps of surprise but she hushed them quickly.

“Shhhh! Don’t make so much noise or they’ll see us!”

“Who?” Tenya asked, fixing his glasses. Izuku had already hunkered down further into the bush and was looking around. Ochako helped straighten Tenya’s glasses and then pointed to the path.

“Look! Over there!”

They had been approaching a T-junction in the pathway with trees and shrubs along the sides. Ochako had seen the lavender hair off to the right and her instinct had been right. It was that woman they’d seen with Bakugou a few weeks ago, her lavender hair pulled back and out of her face this time instead of loose around her face. She wore a mask across her eyes that had a partial beak to it that protruded above her nose and mouth. Instead of that cute jacket from before, she was covered from neck to knee in a charcoal grey bodysuit with what looked like feathers fluttering around her shoulders and arms, torso and hips. She wore boots up to the knee that were a glossy black with some flashes of gold from what had to be clasps of some kind.

It was clearly a Hero uniform. Bakugou’s girlfriend was a hero.

She wasn’t alone either. Some other hero was with her in a bright blue and gold outfit that was also fairly skin-tight but with pieces of armor in strategic places. It looked like a lightweight outfit and he moved with a kind of fluid grace that made Ochako almost miss the fact that he had a long tail trailing behind himself. The tail was just off the ground and curled back and forth as he walked. He looked mostly humanoid besides the tail and some horns on his head, though his hair did look unusually long.

Both of these heroes came up to Bakugou and- wait a minute, wasn’t that that general studies kid? Shinsou something or other?

“What are we looking at?” Tenya whispered.

“That’s the lady that Bakugou was on a date with,” Ochako whispered back, “I swear it’s her.”

“She’s a hero!” Tenya whispered back, “And Bakugou is a minor. She

shouldn't be dating a minor!"

They went silent as the woman finally reached Bakugou and Shinsou. She greeted them excitedly, once again talking animatedly. The feathers on her arms moved wildly with each motion and made her arms hard to focus on. They were just too far away for Ochako to hear them well but it looked like she was talking to both Shinsou and Bakugou. The dragon hero lingered back a few steps but had nodded a greeting to both students.

"What is she doing here?" Izuku whispered, "Did she come all this way just to visit Bakugou?"

"Well if she is dating him," Ochako started, but she stopped abruptly when she noticed that the dragon hero had turned his head slightly towards their bush. She hunkered down further, clamming up. Had he heard them? Did he have supernatural hearing?

Then the woman turned and called to him, "Dragonforce, you have that book on you, right?"

Dragonforce looked away from their bush and stepped forward. He reached behind himself for a mostly hidden pouch and pulled out a book. He spoke softly to her and she thanked him brightly.

Then she turned around and held out the book to Bakugou.

Bakugou took it, flipping through it a little before nodding. Ochako couldn't really see his face but he seemed happy.

The woman asked something else, hands clasped together. Ochako saw Bakugou start to turn pink while Shinsou beside him turned *very* pink. Bakugou nodded to whatever she had said and then, to Ochako's absolute surprise, the woman bounced forward and pulled him into a tight hug.

And Bakugou *hugged her back*.

He had turned a little because of the force of her hug and Ochako could see a slight fond expression on Bakugou's face. She held her breath as the woman pulled back, fully expecting the hug to be followed by a kiss and bewildered when it didn't happen.

No, the woman just pinched his cheek and then pulled away. She turned and pinched Shinsou's cheek again, grinning at him before going back to Dragonforce's side. She called out a goodbye to them as

she walked back the way she came, moving quickly enough that the feathers on her outfit fluttered back and forth, shimmering like silver dipped leaves as she went. Dragonforce gave a brief goodbye to the boys before he turned and followed her.

Ochako let out her breath in a long, disbelieving sigh.

Bakugou was dating a *hero*.

Bakugou and Shinsou carried on walking together, Bakugou opening the book and flipping through it. Shinsou leaned a little closer to Bakugou to read the book over his shoulder and Bakugou didn't even seem to notice his personal space being invaded.

Ochako, Tenya, and Izuku stayed in the bush until they were both out of sight. Then they clambered out and onto the ground.

Brushing herself off as she got to her feet, Ochako didn't know what to say. Bakugou *did* have a secret girlfriend. A secret girlfriend that apparently wasn't so secret that she wasn't willing to show up at their school and in front of Shinsou, for some reason. A secret, *adult Hero* girlfriend.

Who apparently liked to bite, if Kirishima's reports on what Bakugou's shoulders looked like was at all accurate. And Ochako was pretty sure it was.

"No one is going to believe this," Ochako whispered, putting her hands on her cheeks. "She looks so much younger in those pictures we have. She doesn't look like an adult or a hero or anything like that."

"This relationship is inappropriate," Tenya said quietly, his mouth pressed into a thin, firm line. "She is an adult woman. She should not be engaged in such behavior with Bakugou, no matter how mature he may seem to her."

"Bakugou's actually dating someone," Izuku whispered. "A real person. He's… actually dating someone."

Ochako gave Izuku a worried look. "He's got bite marks and hickeys, Izuku. Of course, he's been dating someone. Now we just know who it is."

"We need to tell a teacher," Tenya said, "Or a counselor. Someone who can help Bakugou with this."

“What if we try talking to him first?” Ochako asked. She didn’t really want to admit to stalking a classmate to Aizawa or All Might.

Tenya frowned at her, “We both know what kind of disaster that would be. I doubt Bakugou would be willing to listen to reason on this matter.”

“I never even saw him notice anyone like that before,” Izuku mumbled to himself, staring at the ground while he picked at his bottom lip, “It didn’t matter how attractive someone was to the rest of the boys in our class. He never talked about that stuff with them, at least not that I overheard. He always said he didn’t care or he’d ask how strong the quirk was and if it was weak he said they weren’t worth the time of day. He only cares about quirk strength. That’s all he’s ever cared about.”

“Izuku,” Ochako said worriedly. She put her hand on his shoulder. He blinked and lifted his head, staring at her.

“Why was Shinsou there?” he asked, “When did he become friends with Shinsou?”

Ochako blinked. “What?”

“Izuku has a point,” Tenya said, “Why was Shinsou there? What does he have to do with this?”

Izuku looked away, “I don’t- I don’t like this thought but what if Shinsou is why they’re together? What if Shinsou made Kacchan fall in love with this woman.”

“Can he do that?” Ochako asked.

Izuku shrugged. “I don’t know. Maybe? I don’t know enough about his quirk to be sure. But I don’t know if he would do that either. What would be the point? Why do that?”

Tenya pushed his glasses back up on his nose and said, “Perhaps… Perhaps this is another tactic to get Bakugou to join the villains.”

“But she’s a hero,” Ochako said, “She looked like a hero! And that other guy too, Dragonforce. He looked like a hero!”

Izuku nodded, “Yeah, she did.”

“But she’s in a relationship with a minor,” Tenya said, “And it may be

a false relationship. Plus, not every hero is perfect. They are human and they can make mistakes."

"Or they could be fake heroes," Izuku said behind his hand. "We need to talk to Bakugou while he's away from Shinsou."

Ochako winced. Cornering Bakugou to interrogate him about his girlfriend and his brainwashing friend? That… did not sound like a safe or fun idea. She hung her head and sighed. "He's gonna blow up the dorm if we do that."

"Maybe we can speak to him alone outside," Tenya said. "Bakugou wakes early in the morning to work out. That might be the time to go see him, when he is alone and before there are others around who could be put in danger."

Izuku nodded. "That might be the best idea."

"Who is going to talk to him?" Ochako asked, "Because it can't just be any one of us. He doesn't talk to, like, ninety-eight percent of the class and the other two percent he either yells at or is monosyllabic towards."

"If Kirishima agrees, he would be a good choice," Tenya said.

"Kirishima might get flustered," Izuku said, "And forget what he needs to ask about. Plus Kacchan won't feel bad about yelling at him."

"Perhaps Izuku," Tenya started but Ochako shook her head.

"It can't be Izuku," Ochako said. "It just can't. They already fought once! They can't fight again!"

"Who else then?" Izuku asked, "There isn't anyone-"

"I can do it," Ochako interrupted him. She lifted her chin proudly as she declared it. Izuku's eyes widened. "I think I can manage it, plus I think- Well I don't think Bakugou likes me, but he's given me more respect since the Sports Festival."

"Perhaps you should take another person to accompany you, if at a distance," Tenya said. "I would be willing to go with you and provide silent support."

Ochako gave him a grateful smile. "Thank you, Tenya." To Izuku she became serious once more, "I've actually had conversations with

Bakugou occasionally without him exploding on me. I think he might answer if I ask him what's going on with that woman and Shinsou."

Izuku rubbed at his mouth and looked down and away. She could tell he was really thinking it over, though so she didn't bug him for an answer immediately. She just waited.

Sighing, Izuku ran his hand through his hair. "Okay," he said, "If Tenya can go with you- And if it's early enough that no one else is there- And if you're really sure you'll be okay-"

"I can do it," Ochako said quietly. "I'm positive." She glanced to Tenya, "We'll talk about which day will be best and we should probably come up with some questions or talking points so I don't go in and just forget everything because I'm nervous."

"That is an excellent suggestion," Tenya said, "We should return to the dorm to discuss this. Perhaps there will be others there that we can speak to and get their suggestions. It will be good to cover all of our bases in this situation."

Izuku nodded, "Let's hurry then, so we can be done before Bakugou returns."

Ochako had hoped that the conversation about what to ask Bakugou would be brief. She hadn't thought that almost the whole rest of the class would be down in the common area, some eating a snack, some of them doing school work and a few just relaxing and chatting. Even then, she'd thought that maybe the only ones who would have been interested in coming up with questions would have been Mina and Kirishima and maybe Denki and Tooru.

She somehow thought things would have some semblance of control or calm, even though the topic at hand was the biggest mystery the class had dealt with recently. But that wasn't the case. It wasn't even close to the case.

Ochako sat with her hands on her cheeks, watching as Mina and Izuku debated over asking specific details about the woman. Izuku was more interested in who she was and where they had met and how long they had known each other but Mina wanted what could be called the

‘juicy details’. There were other pockets of conversation, pretty much everyone whispering or debating what was the most important thing to ask Bakugou. The class was pretty split on whether or not this was some sort of villain plot to ensnare Bakugou with the love of an evil woman or if it was actually just a totally normal relationship- save for the part where she was an adult hero and he was a student.

The questions about Shinsou floated around the edges of the conversation. What was he doing there? Were he and Bakugou friends? Was Shinsou in on the evil manipulation or was it more benign manipulation? Did Shinsou know the woman too, because she seemed to know him?

He was just one more mystery on top of all the rest in this conundrum of Who Was Bakugou Dating?

Ochako had no idea how she was going to keep *any* of this straight in her head. And she had to interrogate Bakugou at like five in the morning? This was worse than a surprise language test!

Ochako leaned back in her seat, eyes closed. She felt a gentle touch on her shoulder and looked up to see Momo beside her, looking worriedly at her. “Are you okay, Ochako?” she asked quietly.

“Yeah,” Ochako said, “I think I just need to step out and get some air. I can’t even think clearly with all this going on.”

Momo nodded, “I’ll go with you if you like.”

Ochako smiled, “That would be nice.” She turned to Tenya on her other side and tugged his sleeve. He glanced down at her.

“I’m going to step outside for a bit with Momo,” she whispered to him, “I just need a minute.”

He nodded, “I will continue to keep a running list of the questions to ask Bakugou,” he said back, gesturing to the note bad that balanced on his knee. Ochako gave him a thumbs up and then got to her feet.

She walked with Momo outside, stepping out into the warm afternoon sunlight with a smile. They went to a bench near the exterior door and just off the path and sat down together. Ochako sat back and rubbed her face with her hands. “There’s so much chaos going on in there.”

“I’m surprised everyone is so invested in this,” Momo said quietly, “Is it so strange that Bakugou would be romantic towards someone?”

“I don’t know if it’s that,” Ochako said as she lowered her hands. “I think part of it is that the others are surprised that he’s the first of us to date someone with any kind of, I don’t know, seriousness? And that he’s managed to find and get involved with someone without anyone realizing it? He just… seems like an open and shut book you know? He wants to be the best and he doesn’t care who he steps on to get there. He’s angry and shouting almost all the time in class and barely knows the meaning of the word restraint. He’s so immature it seems impossible for anyone who knows any better to be interested in him.”

Momo was quiet for a while, looking down at her hands in her lap. She wasn’t frowning at them, but her lips were pressed into a thin line.

They sat quietly for a while longer. Ochako could feel her nerves relaxing. She’d be able to go back in and help them narrow down the questions- she had a feeling she’d only get to ask a few before Bakugou got fed up with the questioning- and so the first three or five had to be the most important ones asked.

“I sometimes see him in the kitchen during the mornings,” Momo said quietly, interrupting Ochako’s thoughts. She blinked as she looked at Momo, but Momo was still staring down at her own hands. “I know he notices me but I try not to be intrusive- Mostly I’m going over my school work and having breakfast at the table- but I see him in the mornings, getting ready.”

“Kirishima’s said he’s seen him leave early too. And Tenya’s sometimes down there when he makes coffee.”

Momo lifted her head and turned to look at Ochako, “Sometimes I see him out on the track, at the school. Since the beginning of the school year he’s been going out there and running really early in the morning, much earlier than classes start. I would see him through the windows of the weight training room when he ran past.” She flushed pink and looked down to the side, “I didn’t go there a lot. I really only go when I feel nervous because working out helps me calm down. So before a big test or something I’d go to school early and go to the weight room. And whenever I went I would see Bakugou running.”

She bit her lip as she paused. Ochako waited quietly, feeling the moment swelling in her chest. Was Momo saying…

“Sometimes,” Momo said quietly, “he wasn’t alone. Most recently, actually, he’s had company out there. Not running, but out there

waiting for him. On the bench."

"She was there?" Ochako leaned in towards Momo, "How long ago did you first see her?"

Momo shook her head, "It wasn't her. I hadn't seen her until Mina showed me that picture you guys took. It's Shinsou out there." She nervously twisted her hands in her lap, "You mentioned you saw him walking with Bakugou when that hero woman and her companion showed up, right? Shinsou was there with him?"

Ochako nodded.

"I think that that's been- I think that's normal for Bakugou. I think-" She took a deep breath and let it out, "Well I think we shouldn't worry about the woman. I don't think she's the one dating Bakugou. I think Shinsou is."

Ochako stared dumbfoundedly at Momo. Momo turned a darker shade of pink and powered through, talking a little faster now, "It's just a feeling I have. I haven't seen them do anything but talk to each other or be near each other but, I've seen them at the track and it's so early in the morning and Shinsou is never working out with Bakugou, he's just *there* , watching him. And sometimes we leave the gym around the same time and I see them up ahead, walking side by side and Bakugou just- I don't know how to explain it, you know? I just look at him, look at them, and I know." She started to turn even darker pink and ducked her chin, staring back at her hands, "It's like I can read it off of his posture because I know what that looks like on other people- When they like each other but are trying not to be super obvious about it- But more specifically when its- when it's two men or two women- you know?"

Ochako blinked. "You mean you can tell when someone is dating someone else by their posture?"

Momo pressed her hands to her cheeks, "I mean I can usually tell when someone is doing something gay because, I mean, there's a reason why the saying is it takes one to know one."

Ochako sucked in a breath. She somehow managed to not drop her jaw in shock but she couldn't help but stare at Momo anyway. Momo was- But she couldn't be- But if she was- And if she was right about Bakugou-

"So who is the woman then?" Ochako whispered, "If you're right and

it's Bakugou and Shinsou-"

Momo was a little less pink now as she lowered her hands from her face, "Something about the picture of that woman struck me as familiar," she said, "So I went and looked at the school roster to get a picture of the general studies kids- to get a picture of Shinsou and-"

"You compared him to the picture of the woman," Ochako said as it all began to click into place. That was why the woman hadn't kissed Bakugou and had given both him and Shinsou a pinch on the cheek. She was-

"She looks a lot like him, though her hair is more purple and longer and other small differences but I think they're related," Momo said, "Maybe brother and sister, maybe cousins?"

Ochako sat back against the bench, staring outwards at nothing while her brain spun. "Why haven't you mentioned it to everyone else?"

Momo frowned, "If it isn't true, I don't want people to call Bakugou gay. And if it is- I don't think it's appropriate to out him to the class either. But I had to say something to you before you went to talk to him about it, because, well. If it's true, that would explain so much, wouldn't it?"

"No wonder he didn't tell anyone," Ochako mumbled, " *Izuku* doesn't even know he's gay which means he probably wasn't out in middle school."

"Or didn't realize it until after middle school," Momo said, "That's possible too."

"Could that be why he and Izuku fought? Or why he hates Izuku so much?"

Momo shrugged. "I don't know. I don't really know their history, though with how much Izuku says he admires Bakugou, I'd be surprised if that was why he was mean to him. Maybe he didn't realize it before but Izuku's admiration made him feel strange and he didn't understand that? Repression and ignorance can make people do a lot of strange things."

Ochako nodded. She ran a nervous hand through her hair, tucking it behind one ear, "You know I- I hadn't even thought of that as an option for him. I didn't think you were like that either, to be honest."

Momo gave her a little smile, “A lot of us are more focused on ourselves and our heroic futures than to worry about getting in a relationship. My mother advised me not to date anyone seriously until I graduated, so I have seen a few people casually, but only really in my last year at middle school. It wasn’t serious for any of us, but it was fun and nice at the time.”

“You said you went to an all girl’s middle school, right?” Ochako asked.

“I did.”

“Oh,” Ochako glanced at her, “You know, I’m not surprised that the other girls there liked you enough to try and date you, Momo. You’re really pretty and you’ve got a great quirk and you’re nice, too.”

Momo flushed, “Thanks, but like I said, none of it was very serious. I don’t even think all of the ones who asked me out were gay. Some people just love to be in love.”

Ochako considered this. After a moment she asked, “Do you think Bakugou’s in love with Shinsou?”

Momo shrugged. “Isn’t it enough that they’re happy together? Or at least, they always look happy when I see them together.”

Ochako nodded.

They sat in silence for a little bit longer before Ochako got to her feet. “I know what questions I’m going to ask him tomorrow,” she said.

“Aren’t you going to go in and talk to the others first? I could be wrong. They could just be friends.”

“Well I’ll find that out then,” Ochako said as she put her hands on her hips, “And if they don’t like the questions I ask then tough. They can interrogate Bakugou all they want on their own time. I’m asking him these questions so they’re going to be the ones I think up and choose.”

Momo smiled, “Then you should probably go in and tell them that so they don’t spend the rest of the night debating in endless circles.”

“You’re right,” Ochako said, “And I think you’re right about Bakugou too. It makes way more sense than him and that pretty lady anyway. She’s a hero! She’s definitely too good for him!”

“Maybe,” Momo said, “I guess you’ll have to find out for us all.”

“I guess so,” Ochako said, “Come on, we should go back in.”

Momo nodded and together they went inside again. The ruckus had only escalated inside, though from the sound of it the others had lost track of what they were supposed to be discussing. Ochako approached quickly, feeling pretty confident about what needed to happen and ready to rally the rest of them behind her.

Iida looked over when she arrived, looking somewhat frazzled. She could see the note page he had up was covered with what had to be all the suggested questions from the group. “Oh, Ochako, you’re back.”

Mina turned abruptly to face her, “Ochako, you saw what that lady was wearing both times, right? What do you think about her style?”

Ochako blinked, “What? Why does that matter?”

“We have got to figure out what it is about her that Bakugou likes,” Mina said, “That way we can figure out what drew them together in the first place!”

Ochako put her hands on her hips and lifted her chin. “Mina, that’s kind of ridiculous to find out, isn’t it? Who cares about that? We don’t even know if they’re really even dating or not!”

“That’s what I keep telling her!” Denki exclaimed, throwing up his hands, “But she just keeps saying-”

“Of course they’re dating! We all know what Bakugou is like,” Mina cut him off with a furious glare, “He wouldn’t hug anyone or let anyone hug him unless they were really, really close to him! The only person here he lets do that is Kirishima and not even he gets away with it every time!”

“I’m not going to ask why he likes her,” Ochako said, “I already know my questions and that one isn’t helpful.” She looked at Iida apologetically, “I’m sorry you wrote all the questions down, Iida, but Momo helped me think through what I really wanted to ask, what we really wanted to know, and-”

The general movement and whispering of the group cut out at exactly the same moment that Izuku, sitting next to where Ochako was standing, reached out to her arm and grabbed it, hissing a “Shh!” at

her at the same time.

Ochako froze, words sticking in her throat. They were all looking past her to the door.

“Oh,” she whispered, “He’s right there isn’t he.”

Izuku nodded.

Sure enough, Ochako turned around and there stood Bakugou wearing casual clothes since it was the weekend and staring at them from almost thirty feet away. He was just inside the door and it swung shut noiselessly, the latch catching at the very end.

“What?” Bakugou demanded eyes narrowed as he looked at them. “You fuckers having another weird dorm party again?”

Mina jumped forward, hands catching on the back of the couch as she leaned over it to say, “Bakugou! Perfect timing! Can you come over here and help us figure something out? We’ve been stuck on this problem *all* day and need an outside perspective!”

Bakugou’s lip pulled back in a sneer, “Fuck no. If all of you can’t fucking figure out the answer to something together, then you’re obviously too dumb.” His eyes flicked to one side, but Ochako couldn’t tell who he was looking at, before they went back to Mina, “I’m just here to pick something up out of my room.”

Mineta jumped onto the back of the couch then, practically vibrating with excitement as he shouted, “You have to tell us what it’s like, man! You’ve got to share the knowledge with us! We need to know!”

Bakugou’s anger turned into confusion, “What?” he said again.

Mineta lifted his hands and made grabbing motions with them, “What do the titties feel like!? You got a girlfriend first so you have to tell us! We need to know!”

“Mineta!” at least three voices shouted at once. Ochako wasn’t one of them because she was watching Bakugou’s reaction.

He just looked confused- not really angry, not surprised, not wary or anything. Just confused.

She took a step forward and his attention snapped to her.

“Do you have a girlfriend?” she asked. “We’re wondering because-

Well we saw you with an older woman a couple of times-"

"By accident!" Mina chimed in, "Totally by accident!"

"And we figured out she's a hero," Ochako continued, "And we're worried because- um-"

Iida stood suddenly, "A romantic relationship with an adult might seem like an exciting thing at the time, but even if she is only a few years older than you, Bakugou, it is not a healthy relationship. She is an adult. You are a minor. If she is engaging in a romantic relationship with you, she is taking advantage of you."

Bakugou's eyes slowly grew wider and wider as Iida spoke. He blinked at them, looking so shocked he couldn't speak.

"We know that you don't really like us," Ochako said, "But we're worried about you. We don't think you should be dating this woman. If that's what you're doing."

"I can't fucking believe this," Bakugou said. He sounded a little dazed. "I can't. Fucking believe this."

"We're really worried about you, man," Kirishima stepped forward too, adding in his two cents. "You show up with these bruises and bite marks and sneak off on your own a lot and, like, she's an adult. That's not good."

Bakugou closed his eyes and looked almost like he was counting softly as he took in a deep breath.

Mineta, from underneath someone's hand, let out a muffled, "It's about the titties!"

That seemed to be enough to snap Bakugou out of whatever he was feeling. His hands clenched into fists at his sides, the acrid smoke of his quirk drifting up from them as explosions popped in his palms. He stalked forward, scowling at them all, "Is that what this little fucking get together between you all is about? You're fucking sitting around here talking about me? Talking about the shit I do in my life?" His glare turned to Mina, "Yeah fucking right you saw me by accident. You fuckers were stalking me, weren't you? You just can't fucking leave me alone, can you?"

"If some lady is stringing you along-" Mina began but she squeaked into silence when Bakugou's hand opened at his side and a loud crack

came from it. She wasn't the only one who flinched either.

Bakugou hadn't been quite as volatile recently. In fact, since they'd moved into the dorms, he'd really kind of mellowed out. Yeah, he was still grumpy and mean, but since he was gone so much they didn't really have to deal with his explosions or temper tantrums except rarely in class.

So to have him behaving so aggressively made Ochako and the others tense. If they really upset him- If they really had annoyed him-

Momo suddenly stepped forward, several feet in front of the rest of them and right into Bakugou's path. He stopped up short, leaning back from her, a look of surprise beneath the anger in his expression.

"She's Shinsou's sister, isn't she?" Momo asked. She spoke quietly, though everyone could hear her. They were barely breathing, let alone talking.

Bakugou recoiled a half step. "What are you asking that for? Who fucking cares who she is?"

Momo continued, "I've seen you and Shinsou walking together sometimes. And I saw a picture of the woman. She looks like him enough to be related. Close enough to be siblings, I'd guess."

"Were you part of the stalking too?"

Momo shook her head, "Sometimes I go to the school early to clear my head. That's when I see you two together."

Bakugou took another step back, then seemed to realize he was giving up ground and took two steps forward to make up for it. He wasn't far from Momo now, glaring at her, eye to eye. "And what the fuck do you think you see?"

Ochako couldn't see Momo's face, but she could see Bakugou's shift from tense and angry into something else. Something- She couldn't quite put her finger on it. But his brows relaxed a little and his eyes moved back and forth like he was searching her face.

"You like him a lot, don't you?" Momo said with a gentleness that made Ochako's heart clench. She could just picture Momo's expression, gentle and kind, with a little smile on her lips. "You and Shinsou have gotten really close and you really care about him, don't you?"

There was a rippling of whispers around Ochako. She heard Shinsou's name a few times along with a hiss of *"Is Bakugou gay?"*. She swallowed the lump in her throat and stepped forward as well.

"What does it matter to any of you if I have or not?" Bakugou demanded. There was a roughness to his voice that hinted to the emotions that must be roiling in him.

"I know you don't like us, Bakugou," Ochako said again once she was next to Momo. He turned his head slightly to stare at her when she did it, "And honestly I don't think I really like you either, but that doesn't mean we don't care at least a little bit. If you're with that woman, that's not good. If you're with Shinsou, that's probably fine if he hasn't done anything to make you-"

She didn't even get to finish her sentence before Bakugou took a step towards her, snarling and cutting off her words with his own. "Don't you even say that," he said, "He would fucking never us his quirk against me. He's not some proto-villain waiting to turn. He wants to be a hero like all of the rest of us. He just got a difficult fucking quirk to work with."

"Are you sure he didn't *make* you change your feelings towards him?" Ochako asked anyway. "You've changed a lot since how you first were when we all met months ago. We just worry that-"

"I don't give a shit what any of you think about me. I could not care any fucking less. But I swear to fucking blow you all sky high if you bring up Hitoshi brainwashing me one more fucking time. He didn't do it. He fucking wouldn't do it. If I've changed then guess what, I fucking grew up and learned some shit. He didn't *make* me do anything. He never *makes* me do anything," Bakugou's voice rose into a shout as he continued. He trembled slightly and Ochako felt as though he was actually trying to hold back. His hands smoked but there were no explosions, nothing but heat, apparently.

In the silence that followed this outburst, there was the click of a lock.

"Katsuki?"

Ochako looked up, somehow surprised to see Shinsou standing in the doorway to the building, one hand holding it open as he eased into the room. He was frowning as his gaze swept over them and then settled on Bakugou's back.

“What’s going on?”

Bakugou hunched his shoulders briefly before turning towards him, “It’s nothing. Let’s go Hitoshi, I’ll get my book later.”

Shinsou gave him a disbelieving look, letting the door swing shut behind himself, “I’m not an idiot, Katsuki. I can tell something happened.” He gestured to the wall beside the door, “There are fucking windows.”

Ochako blinked. Oh. Right. In a large portion of the walls on this bottom floor, floor to ceiling windows had been installed. In fact, she could see the bench where she and Momo had recently sat together and talked. Had Shinsou been there watching them since Bakugou had shown up? And none of them had noticed him?

“Yeah well it’s not fucking important,” Bakugou snapped as he walked over to him. “Let’s go.”

Ochako glanced back at the others- Should she ask her questions? It was pretty clear what the situation probably was-

“Shinsou?” Izuku spoke up first, standing up from where he’d been seated on the couch, “Do you have a moment? We were trying to figure something out and Kacchan was… not really being helpful.”

Bakugou stood next to Shinsou now, his back to the rest of them. Ochako thought she saw him reach out and grip Shinsou by the wrist, which made her wince a little bit. If he hadn’t fully gotten control of his quirk that was not going to be a nice grip.

Shinsou gave Bakugou an intense sort of look, putting his hand on Bakugou’s arm. His expression softened and Ochako thought she heard Bakugou whispering, but it was far too far away to be intelligible.

Then Shinsou stepped past him, pulling his arm free of Bakugou’s grip and motioned for Izuku to come closer. “Yeah sure Midoriya, let’s talk.”

Izuku walked forward. Ochako couldn’t help herself and joined him, walking quickly so she was at his side. Shinsou frowned a little at her but then seemed to shrug it off. He stepped a few feet away from Bakugou, nearer to the windows. Izuku and Ochako joined him there.

“So what is it?” Shinsou asked.

“Are you two,” Izuku glanced briefly to Bakugou, who scowled back at him, “Are you two dating?”

“Yeah,” Shinsou said.

Izuku blinked. Ochako did too. She had thought- well based on Bakugou’s reaction- she had thought they were trying to keep it a secret for some reason-

“Why didn’t you tell anyone?” Ochako asked.

“We’ve told plenty of people,” Shinsou said, “Just not any of you.”

“Why not?” Izuku asked.

“I don’t know any of you really,” Shinsou said, “And Katsuki doesn’t like any of you.”

“Not even Kirishima?” Ochako leaned in.

“Kirishima is probably the one of you he likes the most, but Katsuki knew that telling him would mean that the rest of you found out. And before everyone had to move into the dorms we kept it pretty separate from school anyway.”

“That’s the only reason why he didn’t say anything?” Izuku asked, “Because he doesn’t like us?”

Shinsou sighed. He reached up and scratched at the back of his neck, “It’s the biggest reason, I guess. We also figured you guys would have a problem with it for some reason, like that Katsuki was too aggressive or violent or something. That I shouldn’t be with him because he was an asshole.”

Ochako gave a guilty start. She hadn’t really thought of that at all. Yeah, Bakugou was an asshole but she hadn’t really thought that Shinsou would need to be protected from that or something. She’d really thought that, if anything, Shinsou was the one Bakugou had to look out for. She glanced at Bakugou and saw he was standing there, staring at Izuku, with his arms folded tightly over his chest.

Izuku frowned but nodded. He rubbed his chin with his fingers, biting his lower lip in thought for a second before he asked, “Is he happy with you? Are you two happy together?”

Shinsou blinked. He lowered his hand from his neck and then nodded.

“Yeah. He is. We are. We’re… Well, I never would’ve thought it could work out- But we’re good together.”

Izuku smiled brightly. “That’s what matters, really.”

Ochako nodded because Izuku was right, “I’m sorry we pried so much. We were just really curious. And Kirishima and the other boys would mention Bakugou’s weird bruises or bite marks and we were just trying to figure out what was going on.”

Shinsou turned a little pink as she mentioned the bite marks. He coughed lightly and looked away, clearly embarrassed. “Yeah, well. Now you know. So you can leave him alone about it, okay?”

“Was that lady with the purple hair really your sister then?” Ochako asked, “We saw him on what looked like a date a few weeks ago and then again talking to him outside the dorms near the school- you were there for that one though.”

“What? Oh. Yeah, that’s Nakushi. She’s my older sister and a professional hero already. They talk about what it’s like to be a pro and about some other stuff, I don’t exactly know. They’re friends, I guess,” Shinsou shook his head with a little shrug, “Not like anyone can avoid being her friend. Nakushi is really big on making friends with almost everyone she meets.”

Ochako rocked back on her heels and gave Bakugou a considering look. He glanced at her, eyes narrowing.

He’d been in contact with a pro hero on his own? He really was taking things so seriously. Their lessons had talked about making social connections and how knowing people, having mentors, being able to identify other heroes and work with them in tough situations, was a key part of being a pro. It was clear enough with the school setting them up to meet various other heroes outside of the school but Bakugou had been proactive about it, which was kind of impressive really.

“That’s fucking enough of this,” Bakugou said abruptly, hurrying over to them and taking hold of Shinsou’s arm at the elbow. “We’re done with your fucking questions, Deku, and you too.” He glared at them both. “Time to *go,* Hitoshi.”

“Don’t we need to stop by your room first?” Hitoshi asked as Bakugou pulled him away. He didn’t seem to be resisting at all or even be upset about being dragged off.

Bakugou swore and turned, hauling Hitoshi off towards the elevators instead of the front door.

Shinsou gave the group a wave and a strange, sly smile as he was dragged past, “Hello again, Katsuki’s classmates. I’m sure we’ll be seeing a lot more of each other in the future.”

Ochako frowned at that. She looked to Izuku, who had his hand up at his mouth in thought, and then she looked back at the group. For some reason, her attention went first to Momo, who had a puzzled expression as she looked after Bakugou and Shinsou. Then, very suddenly, her whole face went red and she covered her cheeks and eyes with her hands.

Confused and a bit worried at the sudden change, Ochako hurried over to her, “Momo?”

Momo shook her head, not lowering her hands from her eyes.

Mina worriedly came over, as did Tooru and Jirou. “What is it? What’s wrong?”

“You know how we didn’t know anything at all about how Bakugou got those marks?” Momo said, speaking quietly. She was pink all the way up to her ears.

“Yeah,” Mina said with her hands on her hips, “That was the whole point of th-” She suddenly stopped, eyes widening. “Oh.”

“Any reason for Bakugou to hide what he was doing just walked right out the door,” Momo whispered.

Ochako felt her face begin to warm up, “There’s no way they would do that kind of stuff in front of other people,” she felt her throat tighten up, “That’s just- That’s so embarrassing!”

“Bakugou is particularly shameless about the marks already,” Jirou said as she tapped her chin thoughtfully, looking to the hallway where Bakugou and Shinsou had vanished. “It really depends on how Shinsou feels about it, I think.”

Jirou’s gaze cut towards the rest of them, one eyebrow lifting, “And he just said that he’d be seeing a lot more of us. I think the odds of him being just as shameless as Bakugou are pretty good.”

Momo sank down to a crouch. Ochako could practically see the steam

coming out of her ears. She still felt stunned herself. Bakugou and Shinsou? *Shameless?* And all those marks? They had to have made them *somehow.*

"Oh *fuck,"* Ochako whispered. "What have we just done to ourselves?"

The very next day, *the very next day,* Ochako was *minding her own business* just walking downstairs into the common room, on her way to take a nice walk outside because it was a beautiful day out and she'd spent the morning struggling with homework and wanted to take a break- She had her cutest jacket on, in case the breeziness was too cold. She had her cutest shoes on. She had her phone charged in case she wanted to take pictures in the park and she had a little spare change in case the crepe place was open.

She was an innocent. A bystander. She was completely unprepared.

She stepped out of the hallway to the girl's side of the dorm and heard a strange noise like someone murmuring or chuckling or something. She looked around, curiously. She had no idea what she was about to see.

There. On the couch. In plain view of God and everyone. Bakugou had pinned Shinsou down by straddling his lap. He honestly looked like he was about to start taking off his shirt or Shinsou's shirt or *something* but the only thing stopping him was the fact that he currently had his tongue down Shinsou's throat.

That chuckling sound was *also* Bakugou, who made that noise when he pulled back from the kiss and said something low to Shinsou.

Ochako was both too far away to hear and too grossed out to want to hear. She stood there, frozen for a good minute, divided between different responses. She wanted to just stomp away and slam the door on her way out, so they knew they'd been seen but might not know it was her. She wanted to go over and float the couch off the ground so they toppled off of it and stopped using the common seats for their gross making out. She wanted to-

"Augh!" Ochako exclaimed, "I can't believe this!" She stamped her foot and only just barely resisted throwing up her hands into the air.

“This is the common room, Bakugou!”

There was a wet pop noise as Bakugou lifted his head from Shinsou’s and turned towards her. She felt her face flush in response to the very messy hair, red lips and rumpled appearance he had. Clearly, she was *very* embarrassed for him and by him. She liked that couch! It was super comfortable!

“Yeah and we’re watching a fucking movie,” Bakugou said with a head-nod towards the television on the wall beyond them.

Ochako noticed, for the first time, that the TV was on. It was even somewhat audible, too. She had no idea what they were watching but was pretty confident they had no idea either.

“You’re not watching anything,” Ochako snapped. “You’re making out on the best couch in the common room!”

“This couch is *exactly the same* as the other couch,” Bakugou shouted back at her.

“Actually,” Shinsou said, still *beneath Bakugou,* and just chilling there like he had no problem with it, “This couch is better than the other one. It’s a bit softer in the right places but still has good support.”

“Oh is that why you wanted to be on this one? Smart,” Bakugou said to him.

Ochako’s jaw dropped open. Momo and Jirou had been *right.* The pair of them were as shameless as the other! It was only going to get worse!

She didn’t know what to say to that, or to the implication that Shinsou knew which of their couches were more comfortable to lay on. It had barely been twenty four hours since the reveal of who Bakugou was dating in the first place!

“Did you want to watch something, Uraraka?” Shinsou asked. “You can use the television if you want. It’s a boring movie.” Bakugou frowned at him, muttering something as his head went down to Shinsou’s collarbone. His exposed collar bone. The one that Ochako could just see some reddish marks on.

“No,” Ochako swallowed back her shout, shaking her head and looking away. “I was going for a walk. But you two should really think before you start doing stuff down here! Just anyone could walk in you

know!”

“Yeah,” Bakugou said dryly. “We know.”

That was all that Ochako could handle. Her face felt hot, too hot, and she had to get out of there before the knowledge of what he had just admitted to her really sank in.

“You’re both so gross,” Ochako said, “I don’t care that you’re boyfriends, but that’s everyone’s couch! You better not make a mess on it!”

“What do you think we’re going to do on the couch?” Bakugou asked, “Fuck each other?”

“Katsuki,” Shinsou hissed.

Bakugou rolled his eyes, “What? It’s a valid question.”

“It is not and you know why.” He glared up at Bakugou, who just glared down at him though for some reason he looked almost like he was pouting. It was just too much.

Ochako threw up her hands, “Okay, that’s enough for me! I don’t want to know any more about what you do together than I already do! Could you just do that kind of stuff in the privacy of your rooms? Please?”

“I’ll think about it,” Bakugou said with a shrug, “Now if you don’t mind. We were watching a movie?” He gestured towards Shinsou, still lying on the couch underneath Bakugou.

“I can’t believe you two are so- so- so-” Ochako shook her head, “You really suit each other, you know? Ugh! I’m leaving!” She spun on her heel and stormed to the front door.

She definitely heard Bakugou’s laughter trailing behind her, lingering until she’d pulled the door shut and cut the sound off.

“Unbelievable,” Ochako whispered to herself, still blushing. “Absolutely unbelievable.”

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